THE BALLADS, BLUES AND FOLKSONGS OF HUDDIE LEDBETTER

THE LEADBELLY SONGBOOK

EDITED BY MOSES ASCH AND ALAN LOMAX

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FOREWORD BY MOSES ASCH

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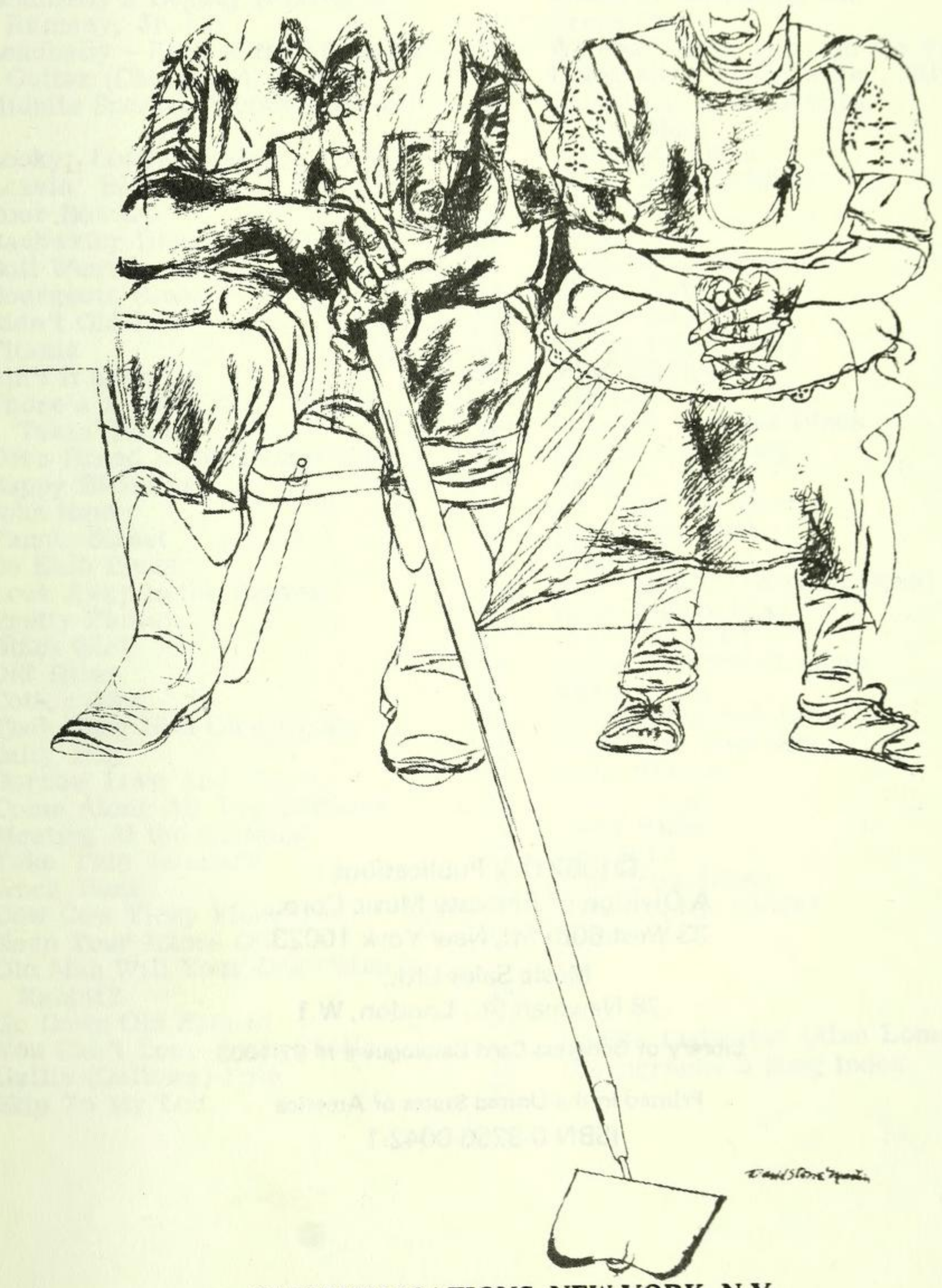

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Best of Friends

Me and Huddie Ledbetter,
Yes we was the best of friends,
Well, me and Huddie Ledbetter,
We was the best of friends.
Well, he could pick more cotton,
Yes I mean than four or five men.

Me and Huddie Ledbetter
Never had no fallin' out,
Well, me and Huddie Ledbetter
Oh, never had no fallin' out.
Well, we were wild to the women,
Yes, and we knowed what it's all about.

The poor boy wrote a million songs,
Yes he wrote day and night.
The poor boy wrote a million songs,
Yes, you know he wrote day and night.
Well, the song I loved to hear him sing,
Irene Goodnight.

He was known from coast to coast,
Yes he was known way 'cross the sea,
Well he was known from coast to coast,
Yes he was known way 'cross the sea.
Well all the women and men over there,
Huddie Ledbetter, won't you play and sing for me!

Sonny Terry

Foreword

by Moses Asch

LEADBELLY — Huddie Ledbetter — was a man of depth who did not mask his contrasting moods. The image best remembered was the face that expressed his charm and affability or the one of bitterness and protest or that of warmth and love. His vitality seemed boundless even as he grew older.

My first impression, and one that lasted through the years during which I became his confidant, his friend, his employer, was his overall aristocratic appearance and demeanor; his hand-made alligator shoes, beautiful wood cane, gray pin-striped suit, his silver-white cropped hair. Even in his most desperate financial days this is the way I saw him. And the way he talked to me. To make a point he would rhyme the sentence and to emphasize it further he would rhyme it again and then illustrate it with some incident. Often he would bring his 12-string guitar into action and make up a song to explain the idea. To me he was a guide and a teacher in country life, in politics, in Jim Crow.

I had yet to learn of his way with children. Although I recorded first with him a record of work songs, Simon Rady (of "Pins and Needle" fame) who had introduced me to Leadbelly suggested that I continue the successful children's series I had started, with an album of "Play Parties" that Huddie knew well.

It was a most rewarding experience both in the manner of his performance, and in his ability to communicate to a relatively new audience the meaning of these dance-tunes. It was a success with parents and teachers. And then I had the opportunity to see him in action with children. At a playground in New York City's "Village" the children took to him like ducks to water. He had them "Skipping to My Lou" and dancing and singing "Little Sally Walker" and what surprised me most was that they understood (they were 5-7 year olds) his directions and colloquialisms. He was able to reach them at their level and still maintain his role as the 'master'.

Nor was this an isolated incident. In fact the concert that remains most vivid in my memory is the one he gave at Christmas for children at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was jam-packed, children all over the place, frantic parents. But the moment Leadbelly started to play and sing, the audience hushed, the children grouped around him as though it was grandfather singing for them, some sang with him, others danced, parents were bewitched.

There was no need for discipline even in an atmosphere where cold and snow had loaded everybody down with galoshes, boots, overcoats and colds.

This was indeed a children's music; this was people's music; this was folk music.

I do not know if the printed page can transmit this feeling, this emotion, this communication.

We have set down in this book the best effort we know to do so. I also tried through pictures to give an added dimension as to the background and impact of the times and people these songs represent.

Talking to you How do you do Listen to this Leadbelly

Leadbelly

by Pete Seeger

I was seventeen, in New York City, when I first met Huddie Ledbetter. He was not tall - perhaps five feet seven or eight - but compactly built, and he moved with the soft grace of an athlete. He was grey-haired - in his late fifties, I'd say. Always neatly dressed. There I was, trying my best to shed my Harvard upbringing, scorning to waste money on clothes other than blue jeans. But Leadbelly always had a clean white shirt and starched collar, well-pressed suit and shined shoes. He didn't need to affect that he was a workingman. His powerful ringing voice, and his muscular hands moving like a dancer over the strings of his huge twelve-stringed guitar, his honesty and pride, showed he was a workingman.

He was wonderful with children. He'd get them singing with him, clapping their hands and swaying their bodies. It was hard to believe the stories we read of his violent youth. I have always figured that here was a clear example of what naturally brings otherwise gentle people into violence. Those little southern honky-tonks were and still are known for fights and killings. And the southern prison farms to which Negroes are sent are murderous places.

That Leadbelly survived prison at all is remarkable. Perhaps the guards liked to keep him to entertain them with his guitar. I guess he learned what so many Negro entertainers have had to learn to do upon occasion - "make a fool of yourself and take the white folks' money". But he stayed alive and got out of prison.

Up north he met a new kind of white people, the enthusiastic young people in the progressive movement in New York City. He never wanted to live in the south again. He and his wife Martha had a little flat on the lower east side. Woody Guthrie and I visited him often there, and made music together with him, till the neighbours complained of the noise. I was proud that he accepted me. Perhaps he wondered at my earnestness, trying to learn folkmusic.

What a tragedy he died! It was just six months before his song 'Goodnight Irene' was selling two million copies, and making Hit Parade history. If he could have lived ten more years he would have seen all his dreams as a musician come true - young people by the millions learning and singing his songs. But in the nineteen thirties and forties the hit parade was dominated by the big bands, and all entertainment, to be successful, had to be geared to Hollywood standards. So Leadbelly sang for left-wing causes, Greenwich Village parties, and very occasional college concerts. We loved him, but I wish we hadn't been his only audience.

Too bad he was never in movies. He was an expert at country-style buck-and-wing clog dancing. In one number he would imitate the gait of all the women of Shreveport, high and low. And another dance accompanied the story of a duck hunter. His guitar became the gun. Pow!

He'd sometimes get on a rhyming kick. For a couple hours on end every sentence that came out of his mouth was rhymed. Sitting in the car, on our way to bookings, he'd go on fanciful flights of poetry and imagination.

O Huddie! How we miss you. Sometimes audiences couldn't understand your Louisiana accent. Sometimes young people thought your style of music was oldfashioned. But you were always honestly yourself, never trying to pretend you were someone else, never trying to be a chameleon for the fashions of the day.

He was not the cleverest guitar player; he didn't try and play the fanciest chords, the trickiest progressions, or the fastest number of notes. Rather, the notes he played were powerful and meaningful.

Perhaps this modern age is not liable to produce again such a combination of genuine folk artist and virtuoso. Because nowadays when the artist becomes a virtuoso, there is normally a much greater tendency to cease being folk. But when Leadbelly rearranged a folk melody he had come across - he often did, for he had a wonderful ear for melody and rhythm - he did it in line with his own great folk traditions.

Looking back, I think that the most important thing I learned from him was the straight-forward approach, the direct honesty. He bequeathed to us also, it is true, a couple hundred of the best songs any of us will ever know. I wish people would stop trying to imitate his accent, and rather learn from his subtle simplicity, and his powerful pride.

Well, one year, in 1949, he started having to use a cane to go on stage. His voice, always soft and husky when speaking, still rang out high on the melodies, but his hands grew stiffer and less certain on the guitar. Then one day he was gone, and we were left with regrets that we had not treasured him more.

Leadbelly's Legacy

by Frederic Ramsey, Jr.

The Negro singer who died at sixty years in Bellevue Hospital in New York on December 6, 1949, of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis represented a perplexing medical problem to doctors who are trying to probe secrets of an uncommon but fatal disease. To a handful of internes at Bellevue who knew this patient was Leadbelly, a musician whose records they had heard and whose concerts they had attended, Huddie Ledbetter's passing meant more than just another entry in a census of fatalities that already included the name of Lou Gehrig.

Like Gehrig, Leadbelly was a man of iron. In his prime, he stood close to six feet, and every inch of them that was muscle was solid and taut. In the cotton fields he had worked up to picking 1,000 pounds a day. And in a Texas penitentiary he was, as Alan Lomax has written, "number-one man in the number-one gang on the number-one farm in the state – the man who could carry the lead row in the field for twelve or fourteen hours a day under the broiling July and August sun and then cut the fool for the guards all evening."

The toughest part was made up of the early years, covering the period from circa 1882, when he was born in Mooringsport, Louisiana, to the day in 1934 when his second pen sentence was reprieved by Governor Neff of Texas. When he was still a boy, his father taught young Huddie to plow, and his uncle Bob taught him to play the guitar.

He has told how he first went down to Fannin Street in Shreveport while still in knee pants, and how his father had to explain about fashions when he first saw clothes models in a store window. On Fannin Street Leadbelly learned new songs, and had his first taste of beer – it was so bitter he loaded it up with sugar.

At fifteen he was old enough to go to the sukey-jumps (parties) and breakdowns. Setting out after dark and riding alone through the bottomlands in delta country, he would arrive an hour or so later at some lone shanty set down in the wilderness: "There'd be no white man for twenty miles." For playing all night, he got all he could drink, all he could handle in the way of girls, and fifty cents in hard cash. At sixteen he was married and father of a child.

But rambling was strong in Leadbelly's blood. Soon he "banished away and went out in West Texas, pickin' cotton." At different times, he was lead man for Blind Lemon Jefferson, who taught him many songs; he drove mules, and he broke in horses. In Dallas in 1910 he heard a jazz band

playing for the first time. He had trouble with women: "the truculent Dallas prostitutes had nearly chopped his head off," according to John A. and Alan Lomax in their book about this period, "Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Leadbelly." Then came the first stretch on a state farm.

The prison chronology is long and brutal; Leadbelly lived and played in an atmosphere of violence and lawlessness. He was sent up three different times; once on a charge of attacking a woman, twice on convictions of murder and assault to kill. He broke clean away the first time with slugs from a guard's Winchester ripping out dirt beneath his feet as he dashed across a fresh-plowed field.

Once this mold had been set, Leadbelly had to live outside society, and his outlawed person was fair game to every bully, gambler, and dance-hall tout. His life was in danger on at least three separate known occasions between 1925, the date of his release from the Shaw State Prison Farm in Texas, and 1930, date of his second conviction and confinement to the Louisiana State Farm at Angola.

Leadbelly never mentioned the first of these three fracases until a skull fracture showed up on X-rays taken years later in New York. He said then that he had felt numbness in his fingers for a whole year following the night a bottle had cracked his head open, but had never gone to a doctor. On the second occasion, he was playing "Mr. Tom Hughes's Town" on his guitar in a dancehall across the lake from Oil City when a man got a knife in his neck and had drawn it half around to the other side before his girl, Era, beat off the attacker. That time, Huddie reported to the police, "bleeding like a hog," and was told to get on out of there fast. The third time, he was attacked as he was coming home from work by members of a gang who said he had whiskey in his dinner pail. He refused to surrender it, and a fight began. So on February 28, 1930, he was sent off to Angola with a second "assault with intent to murder" against his name.

Along this rough way Leadbelly was assimilating song and experience. In the canebrake and delta lands he learned songs and dances for the Brazos Bottom and Red River Valley. On Fannin Street he picked up topical and sentimental ballads that were popular with the prostitutes, and the slow beat of blues moaned out in the barrelhouses. At work he was lead man whenever a chant was set to the slow rhythms of pushing and pulling, chopping and straining.

When he heard wandering piano players who used the bass figurations of boogie woogie, he knew they were talking his language – he had been using that same sort of bass on his twelve-string guitar. At home his mother had taught him lullabies, spirituals, and children's play songs. And in the long years in prison he renewed his acquaintance with the treasury of Afro-American music that is kept almost intact by prisoners isolated from the rest of the world. It was here that he heard and learned "Go Down, Ole Hannah" for the first time; the holler that tells the hot midday sun to "go down – and don't you rise no more!" Here, too, he

learned "Take This Hammer," the work song that is punctuated by the heavy, thudding "huh!" of the chain gang's hammer stroke.

Leadbelly was released from the Shaw State Farm because he sang for the Texas Governor who had sworn never to pardon any man so long as he held office. But Huddie won out; the twelve strings, the magnificent voice, and the amazing repertoire moved Neff to do that which he had sworn never to do. And it was through John Lomax, curator of the Archive of American Folk Song of the Library of Congress, that he had his chance to sing for a second Governor, O.K. Allen, of Louisiana, and win a second reprieve.

That was in 1934. It was a crucial year in Leadbelly's life, and a date that every folklorist stars on his calendar. "I was born and raised i' the country, mamma, but I'm stayin' in town . . . in New York City, what I'm talkin' 'bout," Leadbelly sang prophetically on March 25, 1935. With New York as base, Leadbelly and the Lomaxes toured a circuit of college towns, and Huddie held forth from lecture platforms to bemused and enchanted undergraduate audiences.

It was in this period that another of Huddie's talents was nurtured. When he sang for university audiences, it was often hard for bookish students to understand his dialect, and the meaning of his songs. Always before this, he had been performing for his own people; when he sang blues he hardly had to stop and explain what it was about. But in response to questions from his new audience, Leadbelly began to weave together narrative and song, and intoned his expositions in a sort of free-wheeling recitative. Often the narrative was made up of so gentle a combination of the real and the imagined that it was impossible to separate one from the other. Nor was that ever necessary; they were always interesting.

Leadbelly's voice was not beautiful. It was rough and grainy, and some of its raw tones came up as if scraped out of his throat. It rang out with intensity because he often shouted with violence. It had a nasal twang. The excitement he engendered came from his understanding of each melody he sang and from a strong, precise sense of rhythm. He played his own twelve-string guitar, and its tempo fell in with each type of song; for breakdowns, the strings zinged at breakneck time; but he held the slow blues to an even, carefully marked beat, usually in low register.

Leadbelly was set apart from other folk singers by his extraordinary ability to tell a story, and a repertoire that included blues, work songs, slave songs, shouts, hollers, reels, railroad and prison songs, ballads, spirituals, cowboy, popular, and play songs. And, above all, he was not afraid – not afraid to slur one vocal tone fiercely against another, not afraid to run up and down a scale that took in baritone and tenor registers along the way, but didn't stick to either. The hollers he yelled out were

almost impossible of notation in our occidental music scale. He was not afraid to shift pitch, and he often accelerated tempo to suit mood and action.

Leadbelly went on the air for the Columbia Broadcasting System, singing for the "Back Where I Come From" programs; he went on the air for WNYC, first in the Annual American Music Festivals, then as a regular. His arrival in New York coincided with the inception of the March of Time films, and they did an inadequate job of covering it. He gave concerts in Times Hall and in Town Hall. Later, in 1944, he went to Hollywood. Then in the spring of 1949 he sang in Paris, at the Cite Universitaire. And all that time, he made records.

"The active ones usually get it," was the Bellevue doctor's comment on Leadbelly's final, fatal illness. Leadbelly would have had his own comment, direct from the opening lines of a ballad he knew well, "John Henry": "Steel is gonna be the death o' me, Lord Lord – Steel is gonna be the death o' me." For it was hardness in Leadbelly's muscles that made him most susceptible to the disease described medically as "relentless, progressive, and destructive." He died as he lived – hard.

(Reprinted from The Saturday Review of Literature)

'Lead Belly,' Who Won International Fame As Interpreter of Negro Folk Songs, Is Dead

Huddie Ledbetter (Lead Belly), the Negro minstrel from the deep South who attained international fame as an interpreter of his people's folk songs, died of a bone infection yesterday in Bellevue Hospital. He was 60 years old.

For fifteen years Lead Belly strummed his guitar and sang Negro spirituals, work songs and ballads to audiences in night clubs and concert halls. Some were his own compossitions and others anonymous works indigenous to his race. He was acclaimed by critics and untutored music lovers, a tribute to the universality of his art.

His origins were humble and his later years marked by sporadic violence. Lead Belly was born in the bayous of Louisiana, but he left the swamplands early and became a wanderer through the South. He worked as a cotton picker and laborer, learned to play the guitar and became an expert singer of the songs he heard in his travels.

John A. Lomax, an authority on American folk songs, heard Huddie Ledbetter sing in 1933, when the minstrel was serving a sentence in the Louisiana State Prison. He was instrumental in obtaining Lead Belly's pardon and brought him to New York, where he won immediate renown.

The singer found it difficult to shed the habit of quick anger he had acquired during his years as a roustabout. In 1939 he was sentenced to serve a year in a New York State prison for stabbing another man. He resumed his musical career upon his release.

Huddie Ledbetter

He is survived by his widow, Mrs. Martha Ledbetter of 414 East Tenth Street; a daughter, A. Mae Richardson of Kansas City, Mo., a sister and two nieces.

Leadbelly's obituary from The New York Times

Leadbelly- King of the 12-String Guitar

by Charles E. Smith

"My wife is half my life;
My guitar killed a cow and a calf
And that's the other half"

This is the story of an interview with Huddie Ledbetter, also known as Leadbelly. For one evening Huddie put his guitar on the shelf, sat at a kitchen table, and talked about his life. Books have been written about Huddie; his story has been told on the radio and in phonograph albums. But Leadbelly is rich in his life as well as in his repertoire of songs. So we'll start again, from the beginning, and relate the parts of the story that Huddie Ledbetter told that night.

Huddie Ledbetter was born about 1885 near Morringsport, Louisiana. His parents moved to Texas when Huddie was five, and there his father worked as a sharecropper with Henry Simms, a Negro plantation owner. Of American Negro parents, Huddie's mother was half Indian.

Huddie first tried to play an accordion at about the time he was old enough to speak. "I wanted to be a grown man," said Huddie. But long before he was a grown man he played accordion for sukey-jumps (play parties) and for breakdowns (square dances), absorbing the music of cotton field and cane brake, the music that grew out of the delta country, out of the Brazos Bottoms and the Red River Valley, to swell the headwaters of a new stream in American music – jazz.

At Henry Simms', Huddie walked five miles to school. It was a little better at the next place – only a mile. For his father, by will and hard work, got a place of his own, in the Caddo Lake district. There were 68-1/2 acres, bought at $2.50 an acre. Then there was land to be cleared – "My father would cut down trees and my mother would cut down brush and I'd be home sleepin'."

Huddie learned to chop cotton in the spring, pick it in summer, learned to ride horse and cut wood. It was five miles to get the mail, five miles on horseback to get coal oil for lamps, and you held the 5-gallon can out from the saddle all the way home so that it didn't touch the horse. At night he rode into the bottoms, his accordion dangling from the saddle, and played at breakdowns where there'd be – "no white man in twenty miles. I got fifty cents a night," said Huddie, "and I played sukey-jumps when I was fifteen years old because I had a horse and I could go out and ride." And by the age of sixteen Huddie was married and had a child.

During his childhood Huddie heard songs like his mother's favorites from the church choir in which she sang, songs like "We Shall Walk Through the Valley in Peace." And out in the bottoms he heard songs that went back to the days of slavery. "In slavery times," said Huddie, "they had

so many ways of sayin' about the man, he didn't know what it was all about." In the first song he recalled, there is a play upon the words tender soil and Tennessee:

"This poor old slave
He have gone to rest
An' I know that he is free.
Disturb him not
An' let him be –
He's way down in ol'
Tender-see."

"At eighteen," said Huddie, "I banished away and went out in West Texas, pickin' cotton." At the start he could pick only 100 pounds a day, while his wife Lethe could pick 200. But he wasn't slow in catching up. "I had a friend, Clarence Ruffin', who taught me how to go to 450." One day he jumped from 450 to 600 pounds. But meanwhile he'd heard of a 1000-pound man – "A 1000-pound picker don't look back at it! " – and Huddie had that to shoot at.

He had many other jobs, too, such as riding bucking horses where you "put two spurs on and ride 'til they fall dead – either they're broke in or dead." All of this toughened him for a hard life so that when he was faced with eleven penitentiary years he could be lead man on a work gang, assimilate much "islanded" folk material in the little leisure time allowed on work gangs, and literally sing his way out of prison.

But all of that was much later. His first acquaintance with a jazz band took place in Dallas in 1910. Black Patti came there with a New Orleans band to play in a tent show. It was a typical New Orleans band of eight pieces, strong on rhythm. "Well," said Huddie, "that's the first jazz band I hear. I got more kick out of piano and I thought I could understand it more." He thought back about that time – more than three decades ago, when jazz was young, and said, "We always called ragtime – well, when you played fast music that was ragtime – and when we got barrelhouse, we got blues. Out in Alabama they need to sing: 'Rag is in the bag, we got the .blues – we're in the barrelhouse now . . .' Then they come out on it with their lowdown dances."

There's a lot more to Huddie Ledbetter; he's a man with lots of books in him. The penitentiary years and their background have been written about so often that new listeners tend to overemphasize them. Hardship, ill luck and bad ways do not make a folk singer, however, they might condition him. In freeing Leadbelly the Governors of Texas and Louisiana paid tribute to his essential stature.

And there's a lot more to Huddie than songs and guitars. There's his present wife, Martha, whom he married in 1935, and who has been, as Huddie put it, "half my life." A big half, too. To friends and neighbors, and to Huddie first and last, Martha is solid rock. There can be a lot of strength and inspiration in one person, if it's the

right person, and no one doubts how Huddie feels about Martha.

When Leadbelly shouts, "Go down, Ol' Hannah, an' don' you rise no mo' " he is bridging past and present. For out of the vocal style of plantation hollers and the blues that derived from them, evolved the instrumental style of jazz. There were, of course, other influences, but the trunk of this family tree needs emphasis lest some of the lesser branches, smitten with the blight of commercialism, realize too late that they're in for a pruning.

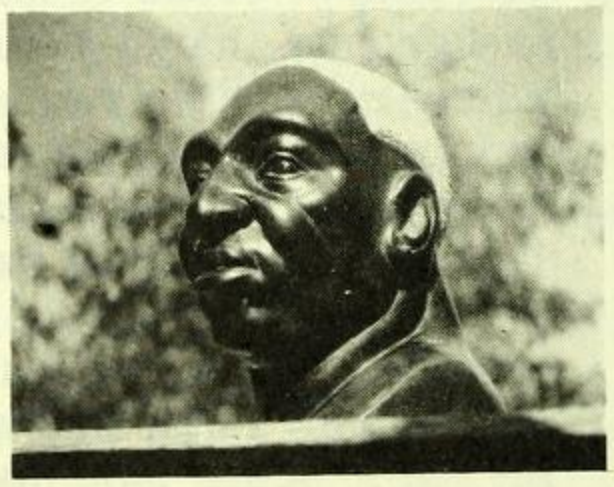
As William Russell has remarked, the hollers "represent the most primitive type of Afro-American singing and are far removed from Western musical culture." And of the other songs, particularly the blues, "His voice is rich in provincial accent and racial quality."

Huddie heard about Fannin' Street – "plenty gals and drinkin' " – when he was still in knee pants. An early parental admonition was "Don't go down to Fannin' Street, son." But his father went down, and Huddie was put up for the night with friends – "Mules was pullin' street cars in Shreveport when Pa went down to Fannin' Street." And he kept thinking of trying it himself, "goin' into town on Fannin' Street – pianos and guitars in the barrelhouses." When he was seventeen or so, and had an eight-string guitar of his own, Huddie used to go down there. He remembers an old-time – not the modern – piano player called Pine Top, a man who had played in New Orleans and in barrelhouses from town to town in Louisiana. "He played that boogie woogie," said Huddie. "That's where I got that bass – on Fannin' Street. And that's what I wanted to play on guitar, that piano bass. I always liked to play piano tunes. I got it out of the barrelhouses on Fannin' Street."

If you want to know the singing or what the twelve strings do, go to his records. If you want to know where the twelve strings came from, it was a man in a show who asked Huddie, "Could you play this?"

"Don't know, sir," Huddie replied. "Ain't never seen one."

He tried to tune it and play it but his fingers got "mashin' too hard." He "went to buy one" in Dallas and played it for a dance the same night. "I put my foot on the doorstep and my finger on the strings and said, 'Here's Leadbelly!"



Head of Huddie Ledbetter from the "Leadbelly Room" at the Dallas (Texas) Art Museum.

Midnite Special

by Woody Guthrie

Leadbelly is the best living folksinger.

He plays his big twelve string Stella guitar from sunup to past midnite while writers, actors, singers, dancers, economists, historians, mathematicians, psychologists, politicians, union leaders, and divers kinds of pretty women and pretty girls gang around him. They fill his apartment at an early hour of the day to join in with him singing and dancing. I doubt if we've ever had a president that had a busier day.

I don't think we've had any president yet that worked any harder at his job than Leadbelly works at his. But, I've heard Lead tell me lots of times, "I just don't like this rehearsing business." And, to Leadbelly, his playing and his singing is not what you think of as rehearsing nor practicing. He thinks his singing and playing keeps him warm and limber, loose and easy, keeps him smiling, keeps him friendly. For fifty-eight years now it has kept him one of the warmest, friendliest, loosest and limberest men that I've seen anywhere, and I've seen a lot of men in my day and time.

Leadbelly has had plenty of troubles since the day he was born down in the Louisiana swamplands. He pulled on his first pair of long walking pants when he was pretty young and down to the barrelhouse to stand around the counter and listen to the jug bands, guitars, fiddles, pianos, washboards, cowbells, mouth organs, juice harps, and to the voices soaked in bootleg liquor and cheap home brew. He soaked in the sights of the pretty girls with the meat shaking on their bones. He soaked in the sweet and sour sounds, the bitter and the sugary, foaming and bubbling notes, chords, and the voices that sung by ear. He saw the looks on the faces of the folks singing long tales and longer stories, funny animal songs, songs about a little black bug just a looking for a pallet made down on your floor.

He got kicked out the door of the barrelhouse lots of times because his face looked too young. He walked down the street, around the corner, up the alley, and sang the songs the folks sang in the hot fires of their passion under the rotten shingle roof of their two by six church, the holy roller, the pentecost, the antifiddlers, the noncomers, the revivalists, the criers, the shouters, the voices and the lips, the faces that sang with only a piano, only an organ, only one old banjo, or chants and hymns unto the spirit of the holy ghost by ear in the slower, heavier, crossed up keys of dischord. He played his guitar in the brew joints when he could, in the church when they'd allow it, and when he got kicked out of both doors, the saloon and the church, he carried his guitar home and played for his own folks and for his own self.

His own folks did not know that their young son, Huddie Ledbetter, would walk and sing on so many streets, would get into jail a few times, would play and sing at so many house dances, nor at so many country dances, that he would play for so many sukey-jumps, breakdowns, square dances, barn dances, church raffles, saloon and backstreet dances. His folks did not know that his guitar and his love for singing would cause him to have a fight over a pretty girl, nor that he would have to shoot a man with a big long knife in his hand. His folks didn't know that Leadbelly would go to the Sugarland Prison Farm for seven years and some few months. Nobody knew that he would be the best worker in the prison, that he would be the leadman. The men on the work gang and chain gang worked so hard and so fast up and down the cotton row, corn row, in the green shoots, in the bitteroots, canebrakes and sorghum camps, singing their worksongs and ballads along with Leadbelly that they won the friendship of the Governor of the State, and Leadbelly even made up a ballad about the Governor. The Governor liked the men, their worksongs, and Leadbelly so much that he wrote out a pardon for Huddie Ledbetter, and Leadbelly walked out through the gates of the prison a man that had won his freedom with his singing, his dancing, his playing, or picking the guitar.

I don't know Leadbelly's story from his birthing day up to now. I've read it in the books by John and Alan Lomax. You can go to the book shelf and read his life from day unto day, I suppose, in more books than one. I lived with Leadbelly and Martha several months back in '42 at their place over on East Ninth Street in New York's Town. I still sleep a night once in a while at Lead's when I get lost, stranded, strayed and left out in the weather, as oftimes happens to us that live by the pick or the pluck of the living string and the sounds of the words called high ballad singing. I sung with Lead all over Harlem, all over Manhattan, all over the Bronx, and all over Queens and Brooklyn. He got me in through little darkly lit doorways where the key turned only because some eye looked out and seen our gitboxes. I've tasted with him of the lye run home made, quickspin, king korn that has paralyzed thousands, ran other thousands out of their wits, sent other thousands off into wild and boiling dreams spent in the slosh of homeless foams, dreamed in the lights of acid barrels. I've sung with Leadbelly in crazy painted rooms where I had to sit at a card table, draw losing hands, drink thirty cent shots of hogwarsh, while Leadbelly sung and played in another room to make us a few bucks to pay along towards the rent. He told me the super found a dead man down in their basement laying piled alongside of ten big fifty-five gallon iron drums of hurry up, rusty cup, homerun king korn. I never did see Leadbelly gamble in any way shape form nor fashion. He told me he never played a game of cards since he got to be a man and he got to be a man at an awful early age. I watched him drink and heard him think. Liquor to him is something good and fine, warm, friendly, and sociable.

Liquor is something that rhymes and sings. It spins and it dances. It is like cool clear cistern water so clear

in your gourd that your gourd looks empty even when it's full. To hear people drink and sing to Leadbelly is, "Fine as wine at supper time."

To see big crowds of folks drinking with glasses poured out of long tall bottles with those government stamps and seals all over them, to Leadbelly's eyes, is a thing, "Cheered with beer, frisky with whiskey, come with rum and rum on the run, pick up your gin and born again." I've heard him say to a pretty lady with a glass of costly or of cheapmade liquor in her fingers, "You're sweet and tender with a natural born sense of surrender."

I've heard him say to a padded roomful of upper class folks, "You folks are mine, I'll sing for you fine." And heard him yell out above the wild smokey clatter of an odd colored, loose nail, rattle board room packed with the freest of prancing dancers, "You folks are my best, I'll sing your request." I've seen him laugh and joke with schoolkids, nursery kids, little toddlers climbing all over his guitar and up and down his arms and legs, and tell them, "You make me feel new, I'll sing best for you."

I've watched gangs of kids that had never seen Leadbelly in the flesh as they played his records. They jump and they jiggle, they laugh and they wave, they weave, spin, buckle and bend, they skip, hop, trip, and they act out every word of the story he sings to them down across the sounding hole of his Stella guitar. I've heard boys and girls of all sizes and ages, all colors and all races say, "We like Leadbelly. I like Leadbelly. Leadbelly sounds just like my daddy when my daddy sings with my mommy." And the kids ask, "Why are his overalls all patched up and tore full of old holes?" And, "Why is Leadbelly's shirt so bad and tore up like his picture here when he was a little kid like me?" "Why hasn't Leadbelly got any shoes on his feet?" And heard mamas and papas say to the boys and to the girls, "Because, Leadbelly's daddy and Leadbelly's mommy worked real hard away out on a farm, but the man they worked for wouldn't ever give his daddy and his mommy any pennies to go to the store with and buy Leadbelly some new pretty shirts and shoes and pants." Leadbelly today and tonight will be one of the best dressed men in the town and city called New York, called Manhattan, called the Five Boroughs. He hates the days and the nights of the seasons and years that he had to spend wearing old dirty sickly raggedy patched overalls. He hates the thoughts of anybody anywhere that has got to wear rags because of no kale, no dough ray me, no lettuce, no kiss of the long greeny stuff, no perfumed legal cash tender, no jingling change, no rattling money. Lots of folks around say, Oh, look how a poor Negro stacks it on, spreads it on, piles it on so thick when you give him a few dollars and turn him loose down the street and in the stores. But Leadbelly is out to fight and to show people everywhere that his races and his faces love and crave to deck out and wear the finest and the shiniest which good money can buy. One of the highest points, the hottest feelings, in Leadbelly's great and terrible pride is his fight to show this world of humanly people that the darker tone eyes and faces hate rotten rags and raveling

duds with as bad a hate as they feel about having to live in the rotted down walls and rooms, rotting floors, rottener rooftops, rotten stairways, and to be forced to always stand in the wore out shoe and look at the world out through a rotted out window. These are Leadbelly's faiths, his religions, his beliefs, his politics, his fight, his job, and his own way of fighting his own war for his great majority of brothers and sisters, kids, kinfolks, friends and neighbors around the egg shape of this long spun planet.

— Woody Guthrie (1946)

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SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

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Dec 8 1946

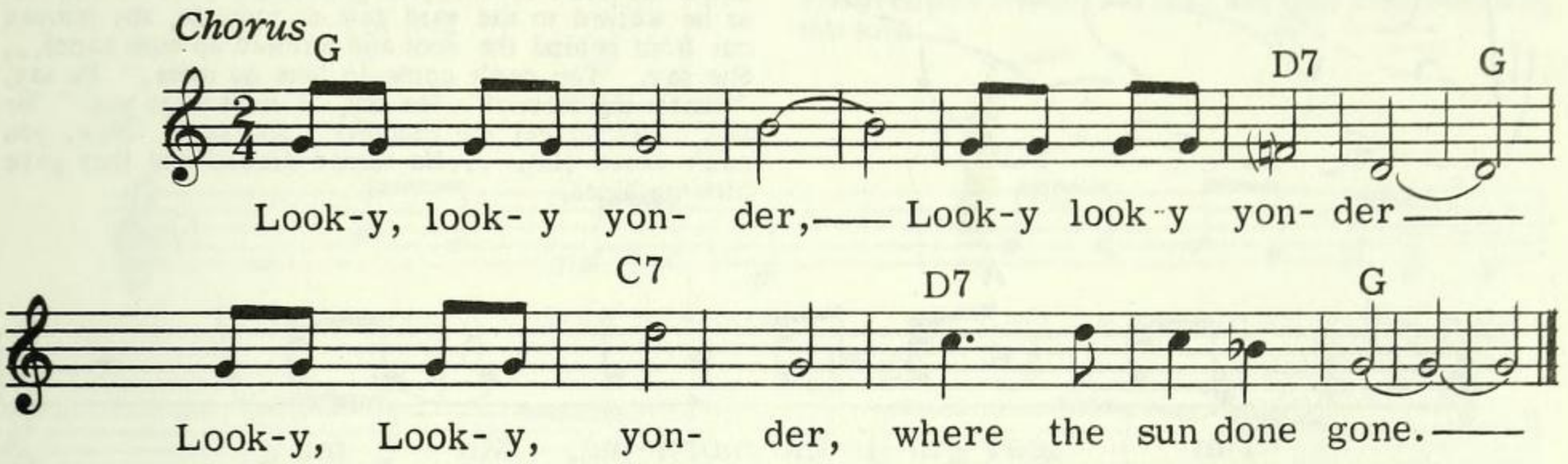
Dear mr mos asch
How do you do This is
your friend H. m Ledbetter righting
You we are Here. Landed Here saterday
night 12 oclock i will Be on the air for
the dis Co the 9th 2 P m Sunday afternoon we will set
up we stop in. Chioga from 9 o m to
2 P m i saw ray he was with us
untill we left. ah the record are
just a few miles Hey sence i Payed
mr and woody it realy did give them
a fair Deal a down Beat Dec 2 1946

• • • We Cater Strictly to Orchestras, Shows & Tourists. — Try Us For Service. • • •

Reproduction of a letter to Moses Asch

Looky, Looky Yonder

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.



Well, I can't hold 'em,
Well, I can't hold 'em,
Well, I can't hold 'em,
Lord, the way I do.

Chorus

Ada got a gold mine (3)
Way above her knee

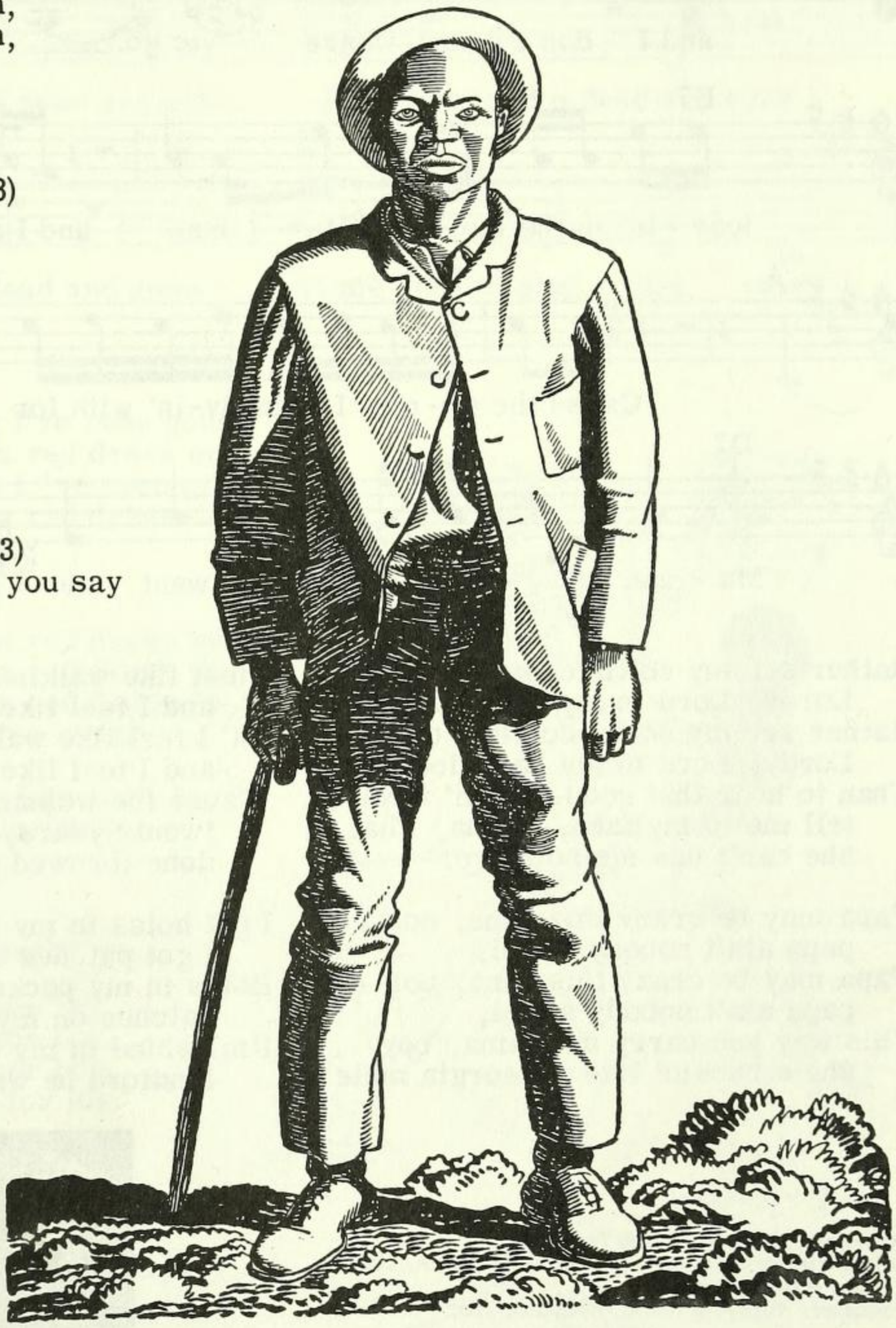
Chorus

Old aunt Dinah (3)
She can't say a word.

Chorus

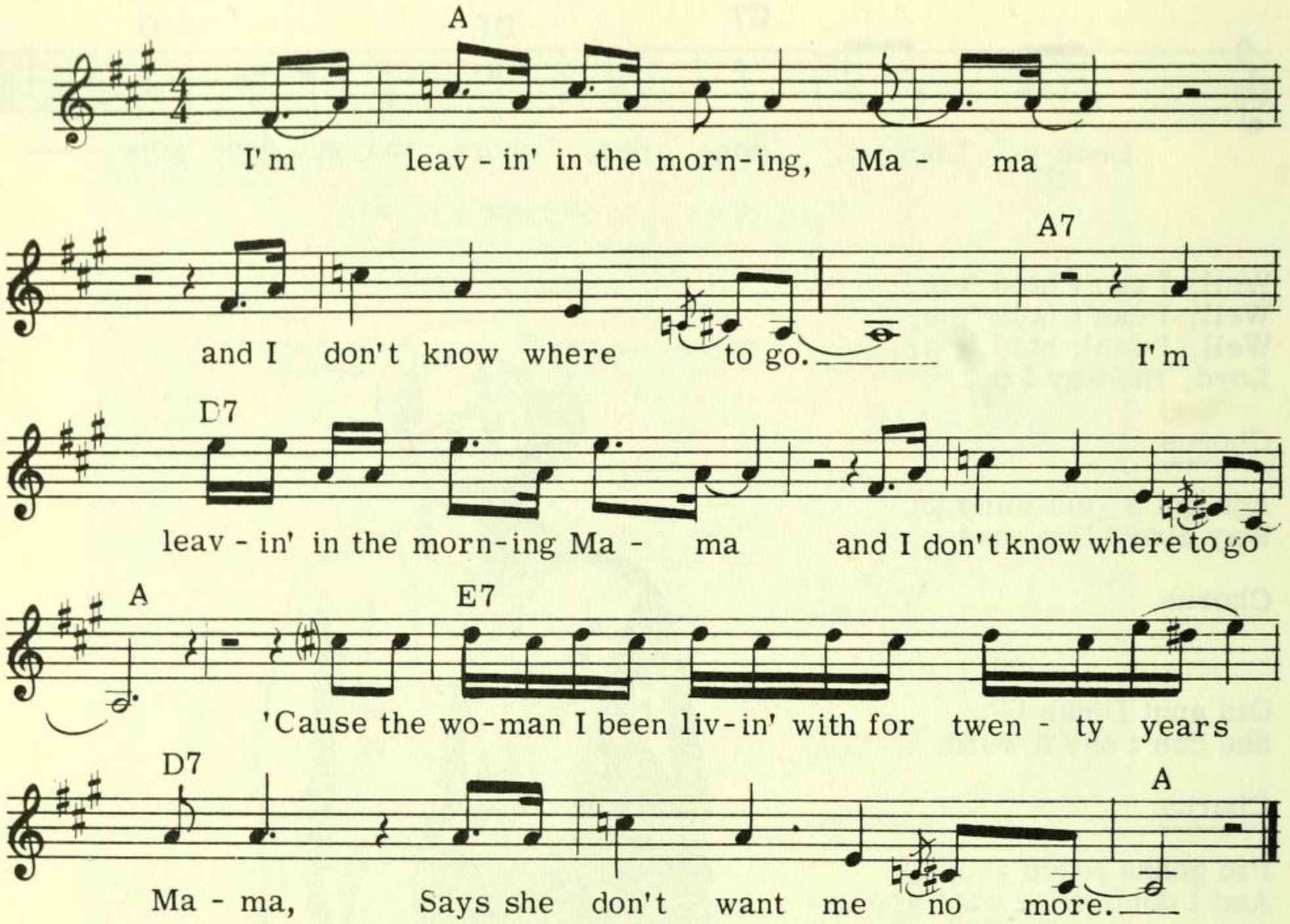
I'm gonna leave you (3)
And I don't care what you say

Chorus



Leavin' Blues

Now this is the Leavin' Blues. What I mean it was leavin' time...this man had lived with a woman twenty years...and he was working for the T. P. S. shop... And when he come home that evenin'...his time to come home was five o'clock...she got behind the door and just as he walked to the yard gate to come in, she jumped out from behind the door and throwed up both hands... She say, "You can't come in here no more." He say, "What's the matter?" She say, "I don't want you." He say, "Can't I get my clothes?" She says, "Naw, you can't come (in)." ...He turned around and that gave him the blues.


A
I'm leav - in' in the morn-ing, Ma - ma
A7
and I don't know where to go. I'm
D7
leav - in' in the morn-ing Ma - ma and I don't know where to go
A
E7
'Cause the wo-man I been liv-in' with for twen - ty years
D7
A
Ma - ma, Says she don't want me no more.

Rather see my coffin comin', ooh -
Lordy, Lord in my back door,
Rather see my coffin comin', ooh -
Lordy, Lord in my back door,
Than to hear that good-lookin' woman
tell me to my face, mama, That
she can't use me no more.

Papa may be crazy this time, ooh -
papa ain't nobody's fool,
Papa may be crazy this time, ooh -
papa ain't nobody's fool,
This way you carry on mama, boy
she's buckin' like a Georgia mule

I feel like walkin', Mama, ooh -
and I feel like lyin' down,
An' I feel like walkin', Mama, ooh -
and I feel like lyin' down,
'Cause the woman I been livin' with for
twenty years, Mama, Lord she
done throwed me down.

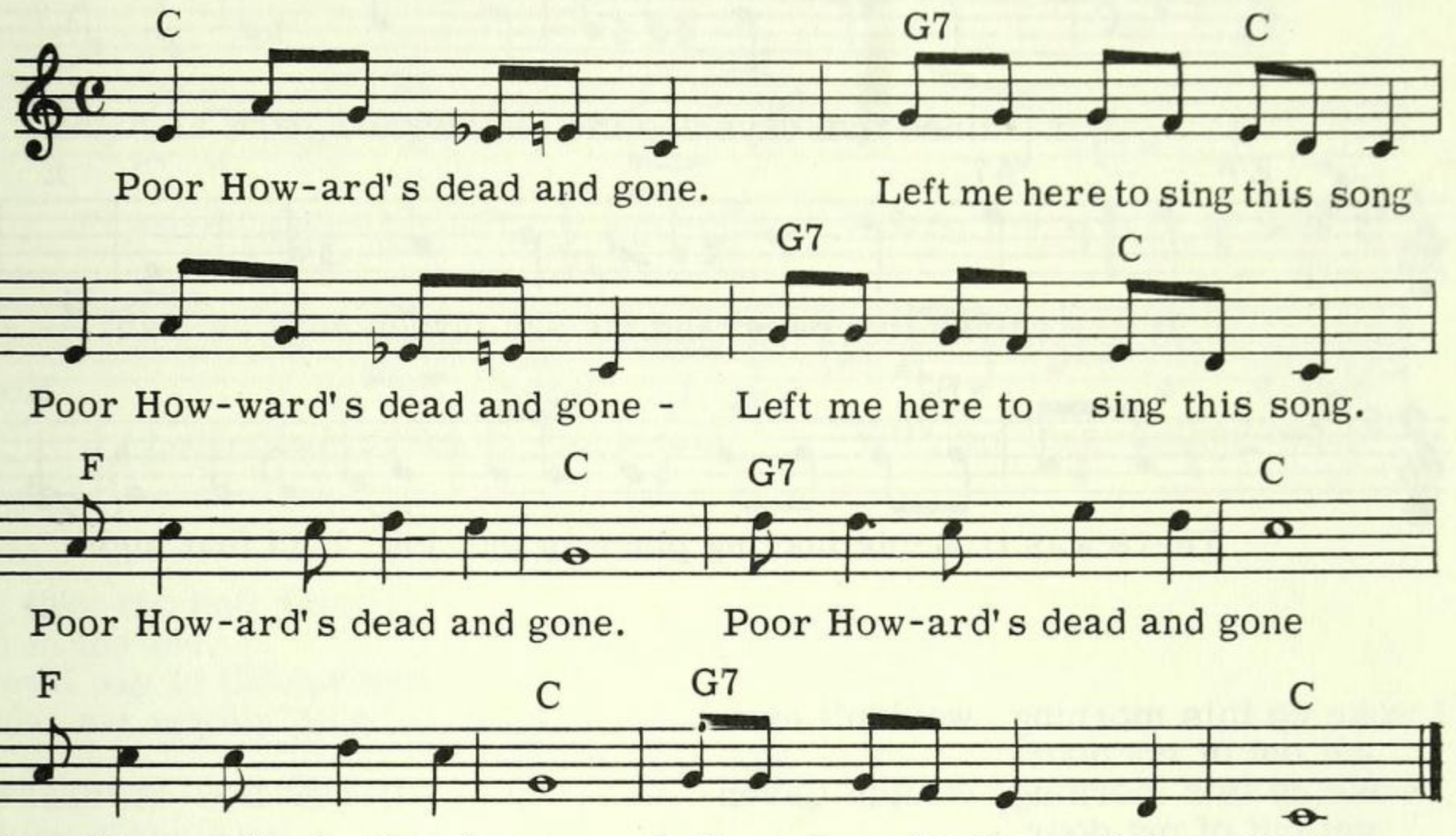
I got holes in my pockets, baby, ooh -
I got patches on my pants,
Holes in my pockets, baby, ooh -
patches on my pants,
I'm behind in my house rent, Mama,
landlord he want it all in advance.

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Edited with new additional material by John A. Lomax
and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Poor Howard

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Poor Howard was a poor boy, he went all around the plantations playing for the sukey jumps. He was the first man who started sukey-jump playing in the whole world. And when poor Howard was dead and gone everybody sang this song.



Who's been here since I've been gone?
Pretty little girl with a red dress on.
Who's been here since I 've been gone?
Pretty little girl with a red dress on.

Chorus

Pretty little girl with a red dress on,
Pretty little girl with a red dress on,
Pretty little girl with a red dress on,
Left me here to sing this song.

Who's been here since I've been gone?
Great big man with a derby on...

Chorus

Great big man with a derby on...

Poor Howard was a poor boy,
Poor Howard was a poor boy,
Poor Howard was a poor boy,
Left me here to shout for joy.

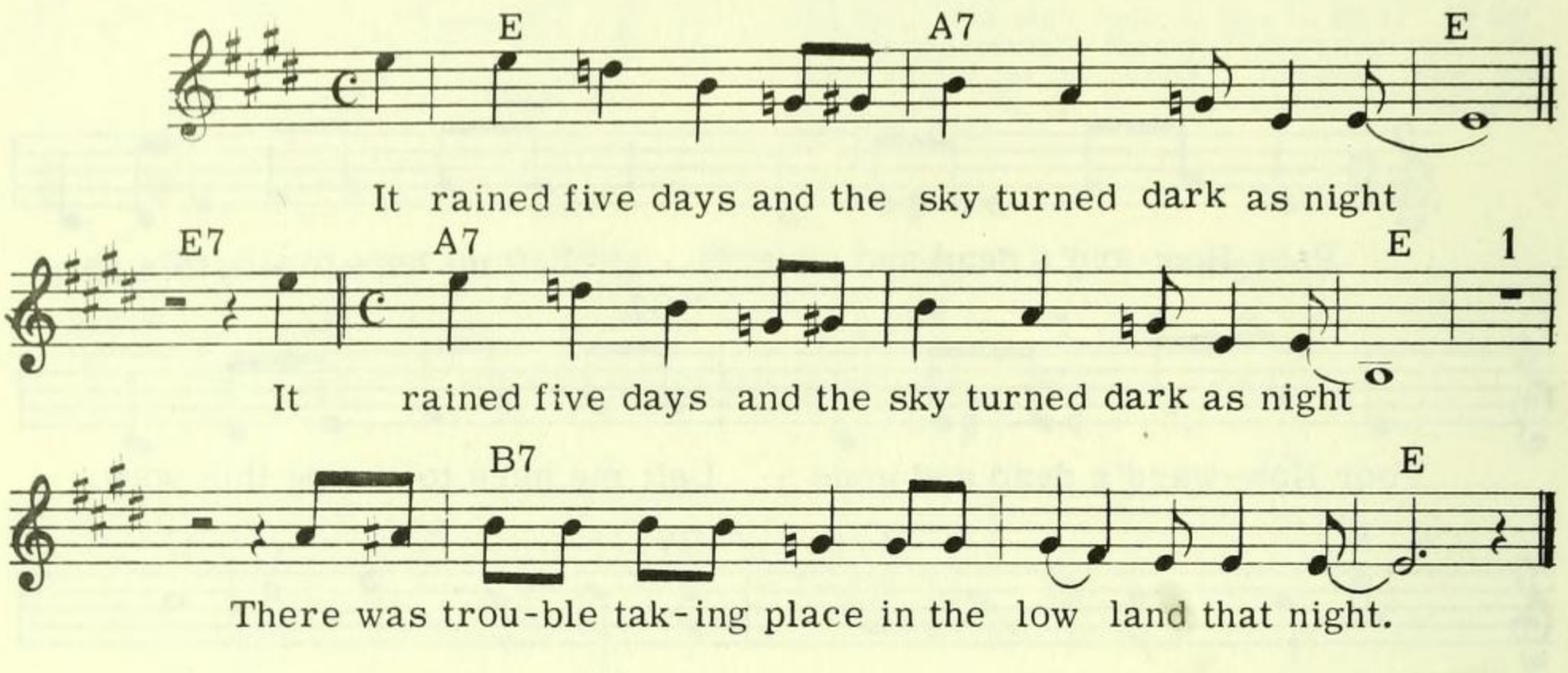
Chorus

Left me here to shout for joy
Left me here to shout for joy
Left me here to shout for joy
Left me here to shout for joy.

Backwater Blues

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

When you're broke and you ain't got a dime, something's on your mind — and that's the blues.



I woke up this morning, wouldn't even
get out of my door,
I woke up this morning, wouldn't even
get out of my door,
Enough trouble to make a poor girl
wonder where she gonna go.

It thundered and it lightened and the
winds began to blow (2x)
There was a thousand women didn't
have no place to go.

I went out to the lonesome, high old
lonesome hill (2x)
I looked down on the old house where I
used to live.

Backwater Blues have caused me to
pack up my things and go
Cause my house fell down and I can't
live there no more

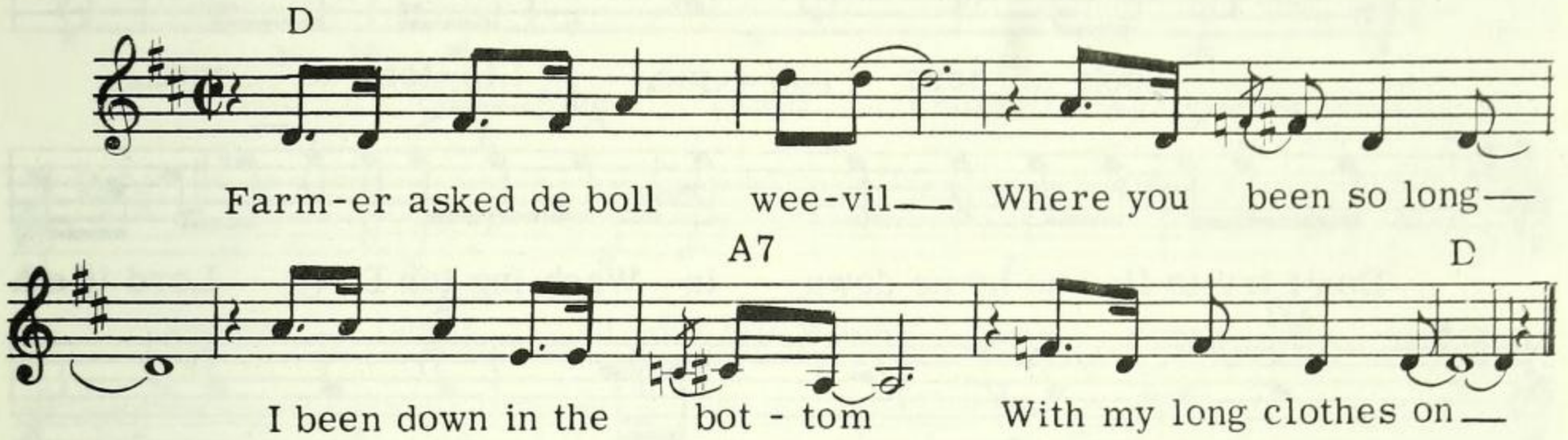
Mmm I can't live there no more (2x)
And there ain't a place for a poor old
girl to go.

They rowed a little boat about five
miles 'cross me farm (2x)
I packed up all my clothing - throwed it
in and they rowed me along.

Boll Weevil

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

A blues is a feelin' —and when you get the blues, it'll make some people wear out their shoes and they got the blues when they wear out their shoes and blues is the sad news. The Boll Weevil—I'll tell you a little story about it—which is a bug long years ago—robbed people of their homes—and ever since the Boll Weevil been gone —the people been singin' this song:



Farmer take the boll weevil,
Put him in the ice.
Boll weevil say to the farmer,
"You treat me mighty nice".

Farmer take the boll weevil,
He put him in the sand.
Boll weevil say to the farmer,
"You just like a man."

Man said to the old lady,
"What do you think of that?
I got one of them boll weevils
Out of my Stetson hat."

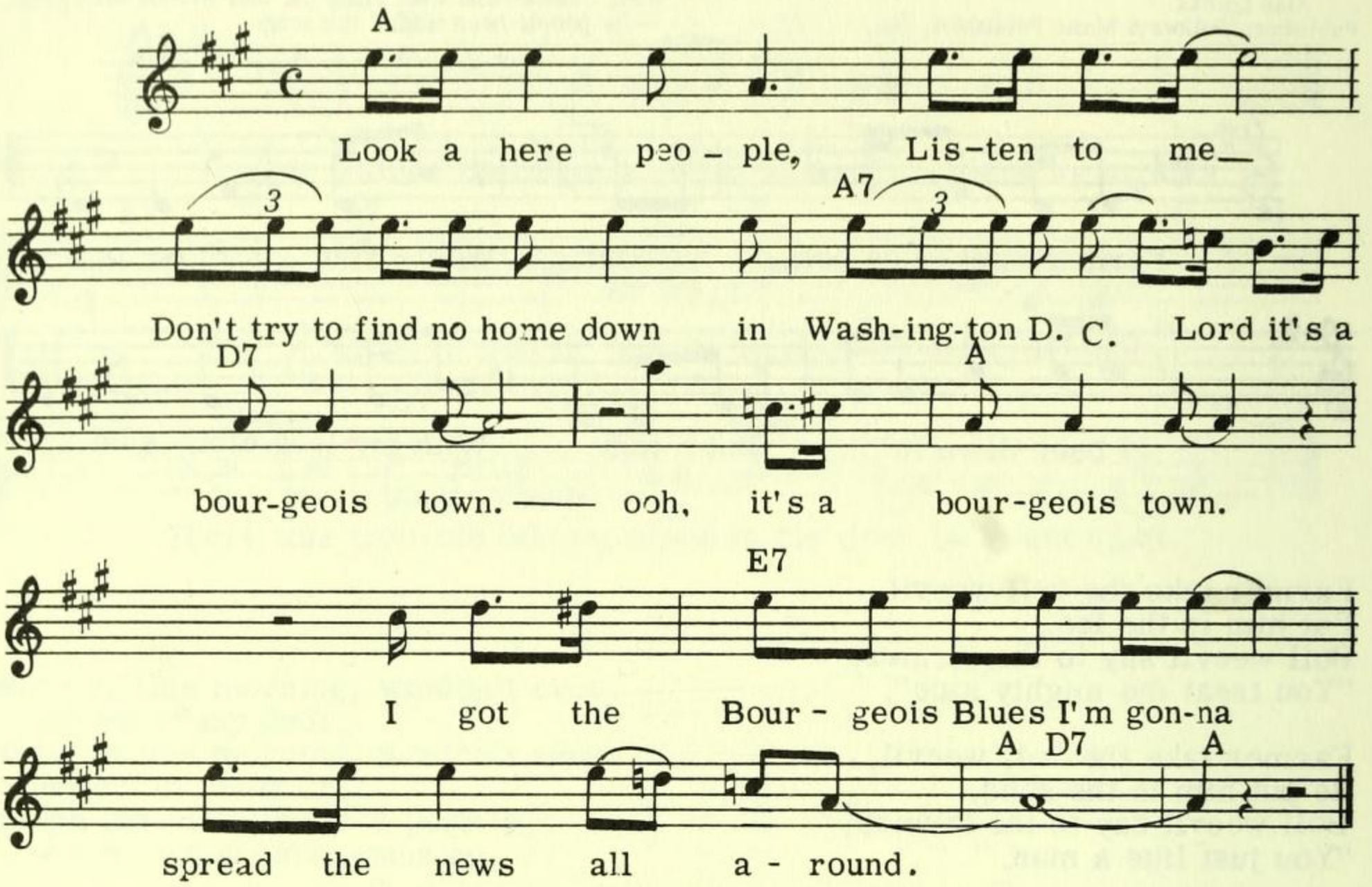
Farmer said to the boll weevil,
"Yes I wish you well".
He said to the boll weevil,
"I hope you burn in hell."

Boll weevil said to the farmer,
"I'm gonna swing on your gate,
When I get through with your cotton,
You'll sell your Cadillac eight."

Boll weevil said to farmer,
"I'm gonna treat you mean,
When I get through with your cotton,
You buy no gasoline."

Bourgeois Blues

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.


A
C
Look a here peo - ple, Lis-ten to me_
3
A7
3
Don't try to find no home down in Wash-ing-ton D. C. Lord it's a
D7
A
bour-geois town. —— ooh, it's a bour-geois town.
E7
I got the Bour - geois Blues I'm gon-na
A D7 A
spread the news all a - round.

That brings news and makes a man wear out his shoes when he gets in a Jim Crow place.

Me and Martha was standin' upstairs,
I heard a white man say, "Don't want
no colored up there".

Chorus

Home of the brave, land of the free -
I don't want to be mistreated by no
bourgeoisie.

Chorus

White folks in Washington, they know
how,
Throw a colored man a nickel to see
him bow.

Chorus

Tell all the colored folks to listen to
me,
Don't try to find a home in Washington
D. C.

Chorus

Didn't Old John

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

I was working for the Captain,
And he was so hard to please.

E
A7
Did- n't Old John (wah) cross the wa-ter, Wa-ter on his
E
knees (wah) Did-n't Old John (wah) cross the wa-ter
B7
E
(wah) on his knees (wah) Let us all (wah) bow
E7
A
E
down (wah) Good Lord and face, face the ris-ing sun.
(wah) Did - n't Old John (wah) cross the wa - ter
A7
E
wa - ter on his knees.

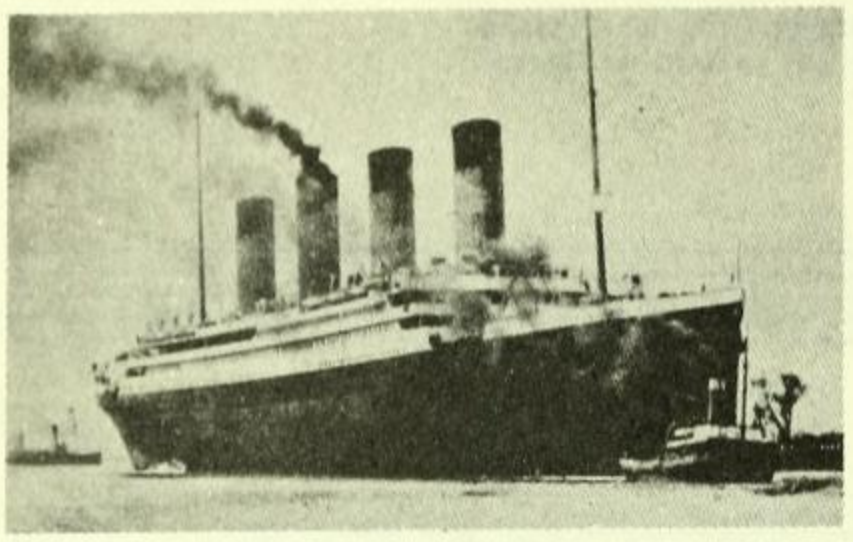
Didn't old John (wah) swim the water,
water on his knees, (wah)
Didn't old John (wah) swim the water,
water on his knees, (wah)

Let us all (wah) bow down (wah)
Good Lord, and face the rising sun (wah)
Didn't old John (wah) cross the water
on his knees.

....walk the water ....

Titanic

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.



Look where and what has been done —1912, 12th day of May, when the Titanic sink in the sea. When they was getting on board (there) was not no colored folks on. There was not no Negroes died on that ship. But Jack Johnson went to get on board. "We are not hauling no coal," (they said). So Jack Johnson didn't like what the Big Boss said. He went and tried to do something about it, but it was so much Jim Crow he could not have no go. And a few hours later Jack Johnson read the papers where the Titanic went down. Then the peoples began to holler about that mighty shock. You might have seen Jack Johnson doing the Eagle Rock so glad that he was not on that ship.

—from a letter to Moses Asch

Titanic, when it got its load,
Captain hollered, "All aboard"
Cryin', fare thee, Titanic, fare thee
well. (repeat each verse)

Jack Johnson want to get on board,
Captain said, "I ain't haulin no coal"
Cryin...

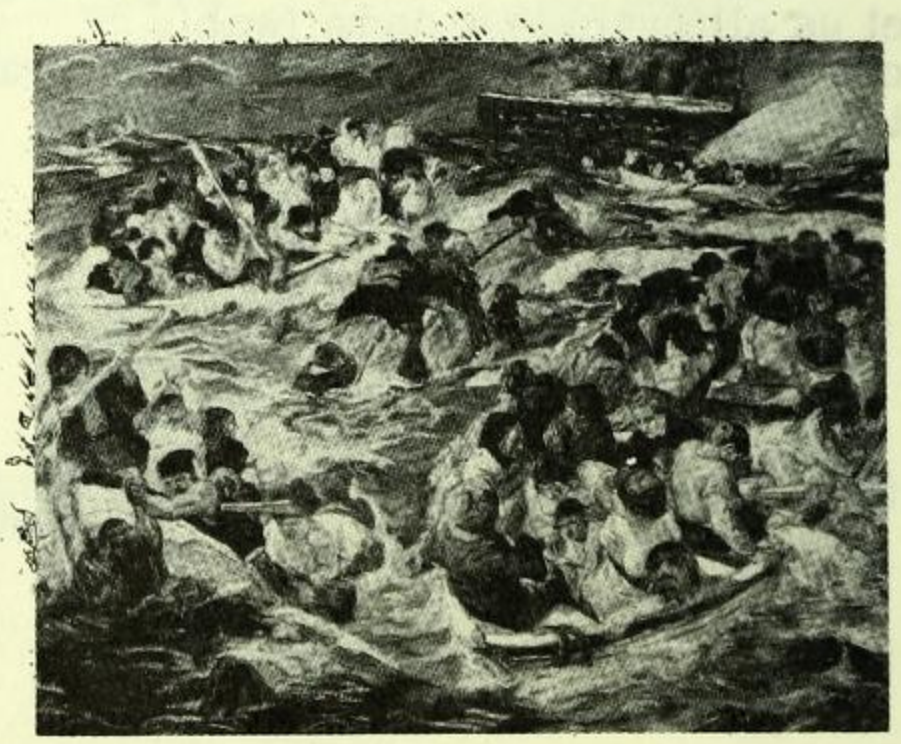
Titanic was comin' 'round the curve
When it ran into that great big iceberg
Cryin...

Titanic was sinking down,
Had them lifeboats all around.
Cryin...

Had them lifeboats around,
Savin' the women and children, lettin'
the men go down.
Cryin...

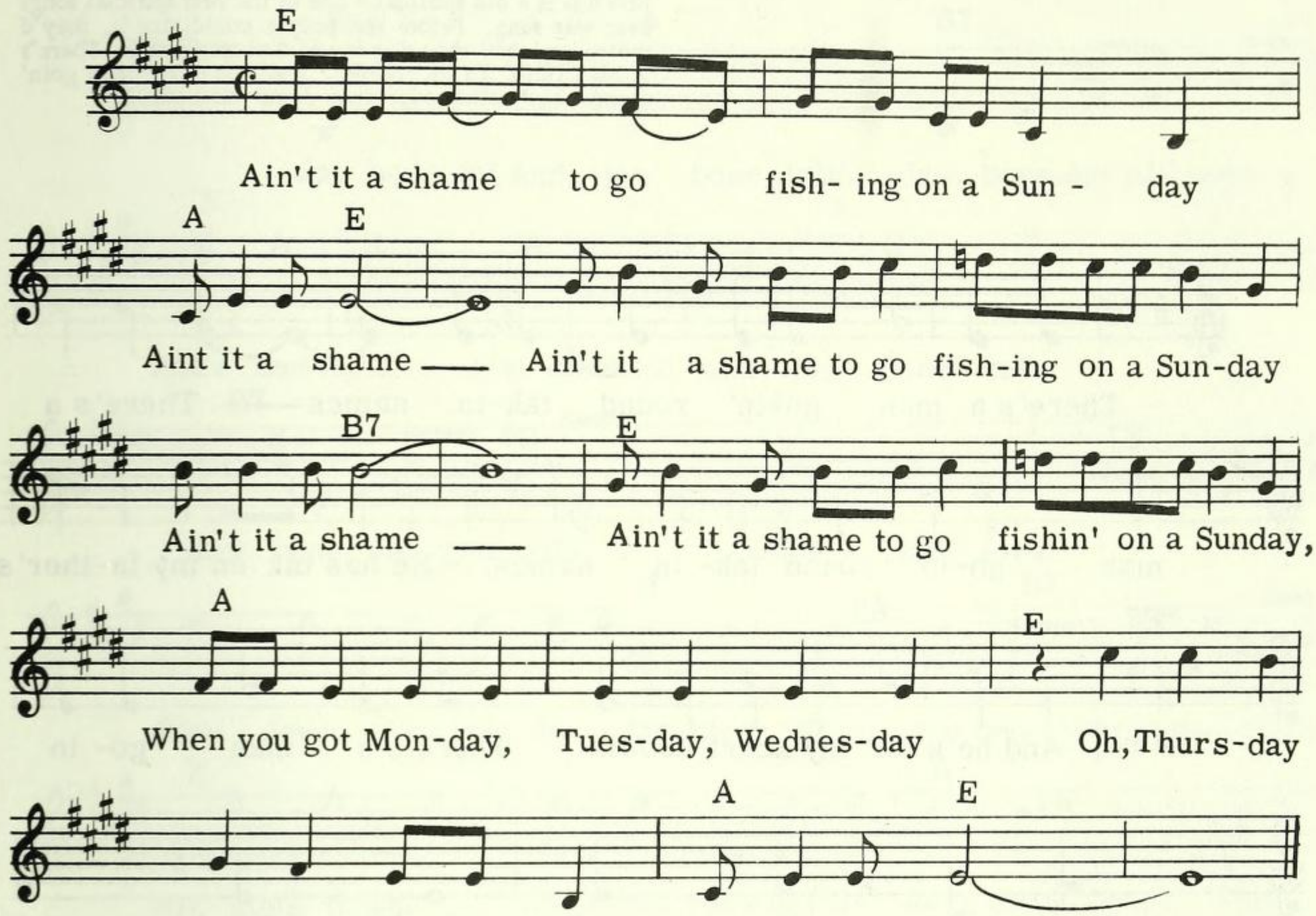
Jack Johnson heard the mighty shock,
Might 'a' seen him doin' the Eagle
Rock.
Cryin...

When the women and children got on the
land,
Cryin..., "Lord have mercy on my
man."



Ain't It a Shame

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.


E
Ain't it a shame to go fish- ing on a Sun - day
A
E
Aint it a shame — Ain't it a shame to go fish-ing on a Sun-day
B7
E
Ain't it a shame — Ain't it a shame to go fishin' on a Sunday,
A
E
When you got Mon-day, Tues-day, Wednes-day Oh, Thurs-day
A
E
Fri- day, Sat - ur - day, Ain't it a shame.

Ain't it a shame to kiss the girls on
Sunday, ain't it a shame?
Ain't it a shame to kiss the girls on
Sunday, ain't it a shame?
Ain't it a shame to kiss the girls on
Sunday,
When you got Monday, Tuesday,
Wednesday - oh, Thursday,
Friday, Saturday;
Ain't it a shame!

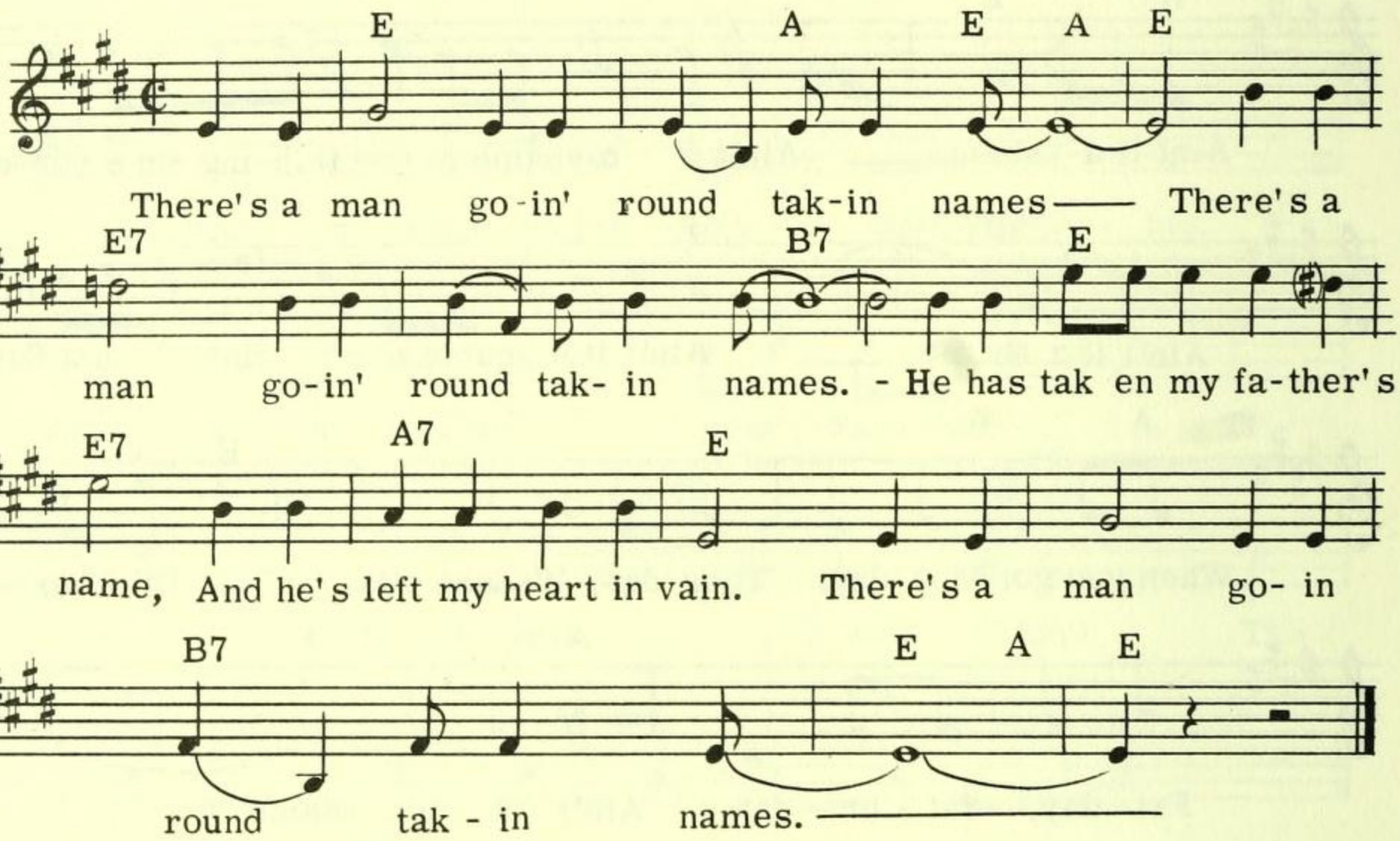
Ain't it a shame to take a drink on
Sunday...

Ain't it a shame to beat your wife on
Sunday...

There's A Man Goin' 'Round Takin' Names

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

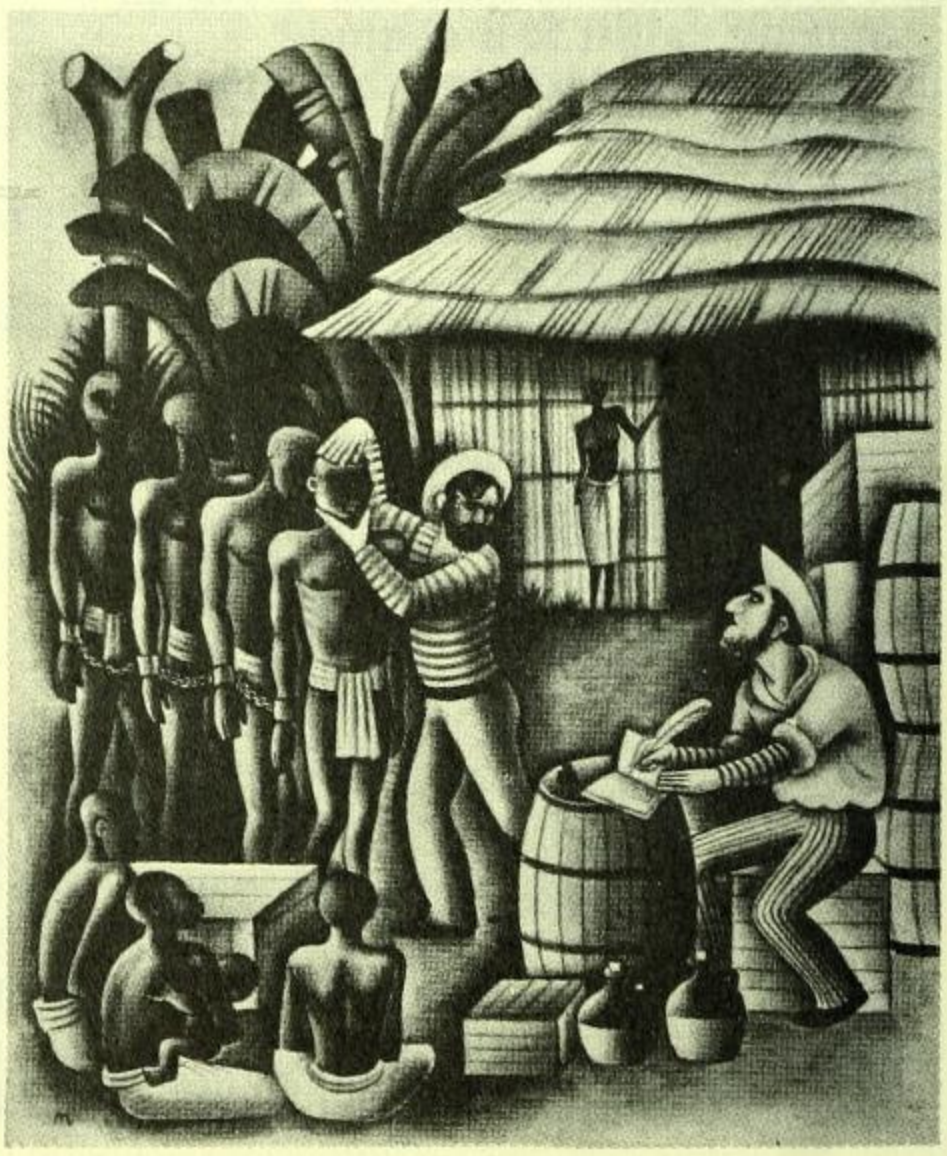
Now this is a old spiritual - one of the first spiritual songs ever was sung. Before the people could sing it, they'd moan; and now they sing it and that spiritual is, There's A Man Goin' Takin' Names, and that man been goin' round takin' names ever since there was a world.


E A E A E
There's a man go-in' round tak-in names—— There's a
E7 B7 E
man go-in' round tak- in names. - He has tak en my fa-ther's
E7 A7 E
name, And he's left my heart in vain. There's a man go- in
B7 E A E
round tak - in names.——

There's a man goin' 'round takin'
names,
There's a man goin' 'round takin'
names,
He has taken my mother's name and
has left me here in vain;
There's a man goin' 'round takin'
names.

...He has taken my sister's name...

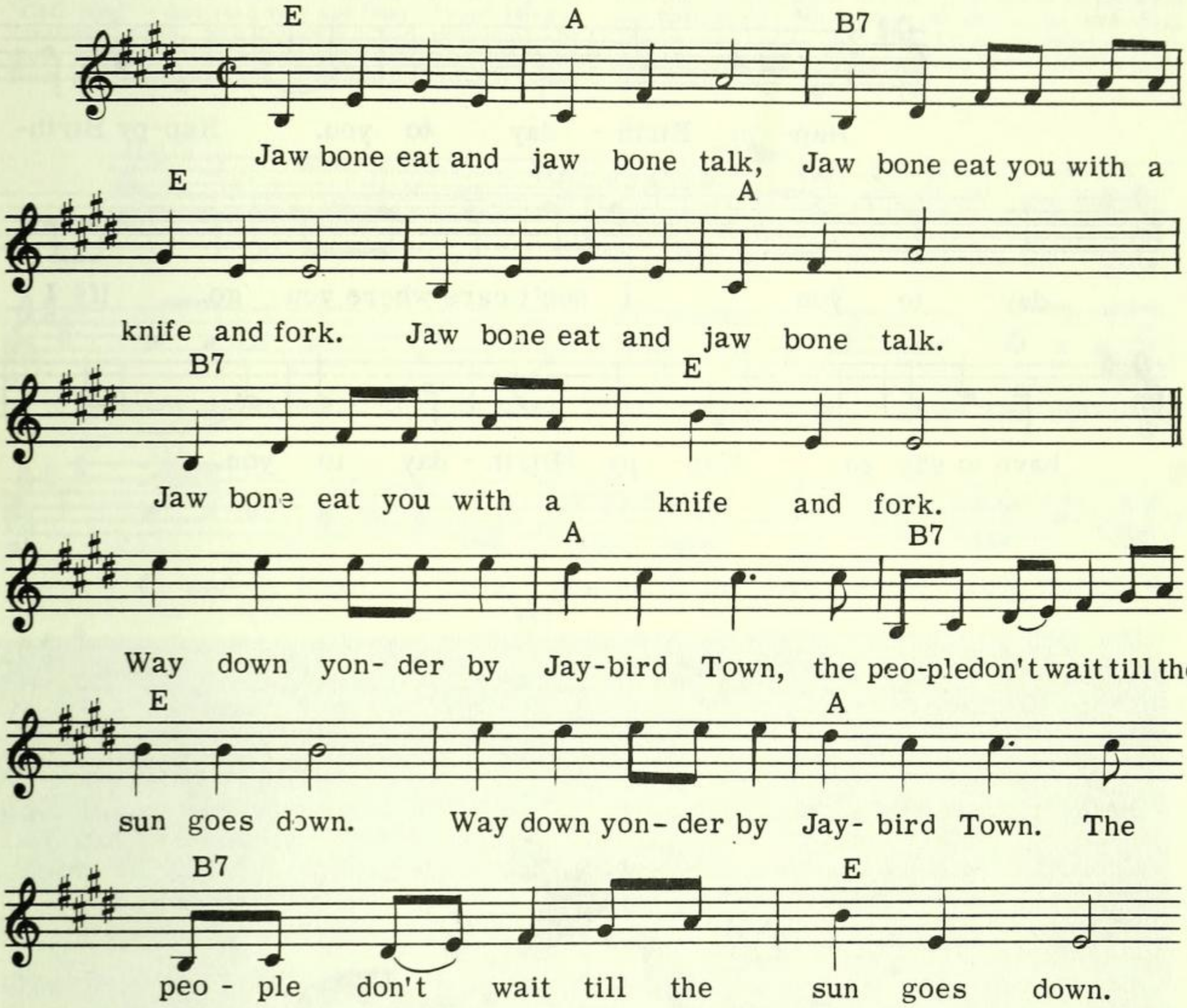
...He has taken my brother's name...



Corn Bread Rough (SUKEY JUMP)

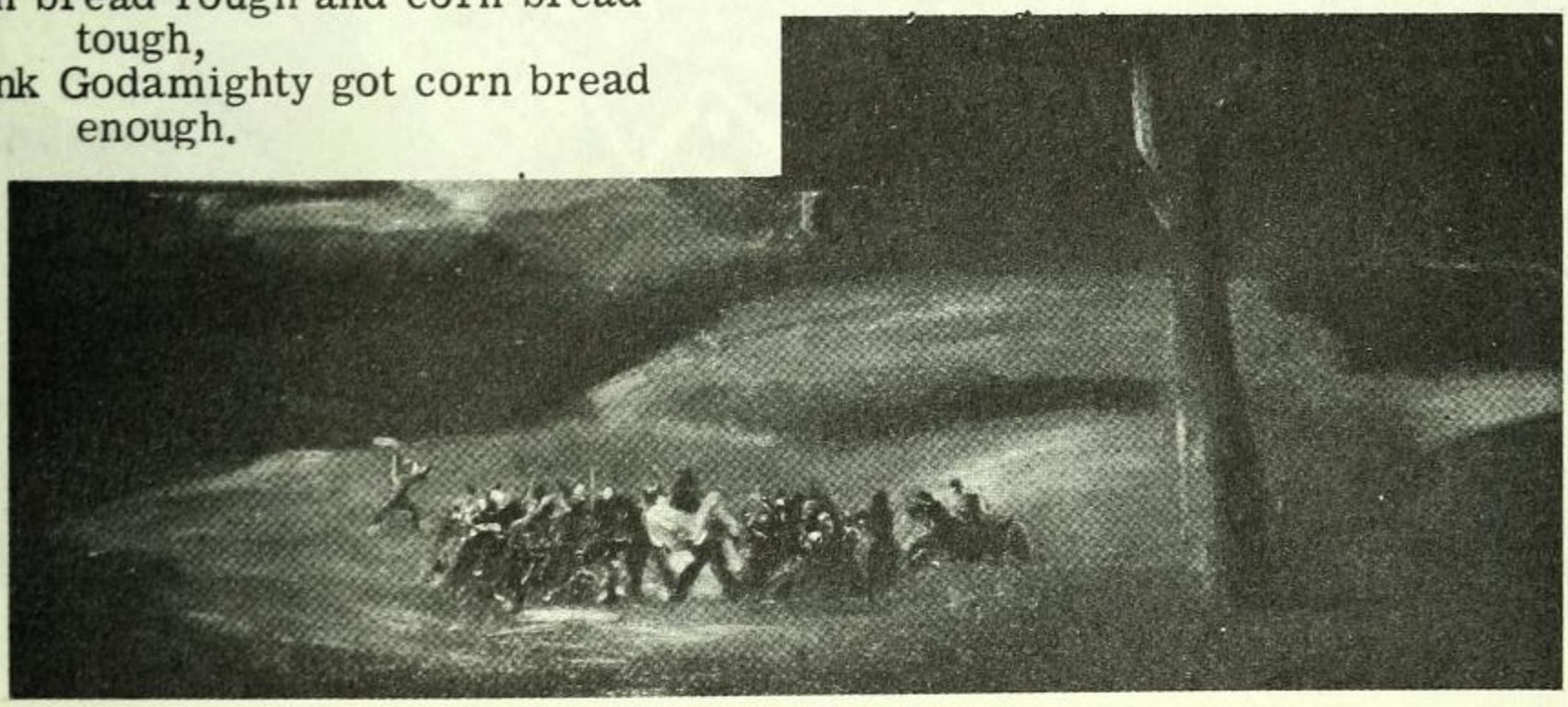
Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

No white man in twenty miles...I got fifty cents a night, and I played Sukey-Jumps when I was fifteen years old because I had a horse and I could go out and ride.


E A B7
Jaw bone eat and jaw bone talk, Jaw bone eat you with a
E A
knife and fork. Jaw bone eat and jaw bone talk.
B7 E
Jaw bone eat you with a knife and fork.
A B7
Way down yon- der by Jay-bird Town, the peo-pledon't wait till the
E A
sun goes down. Way down yon- der by Jay- bird Town. The
B7 E
peo - ple don't wait till the sun goes down.

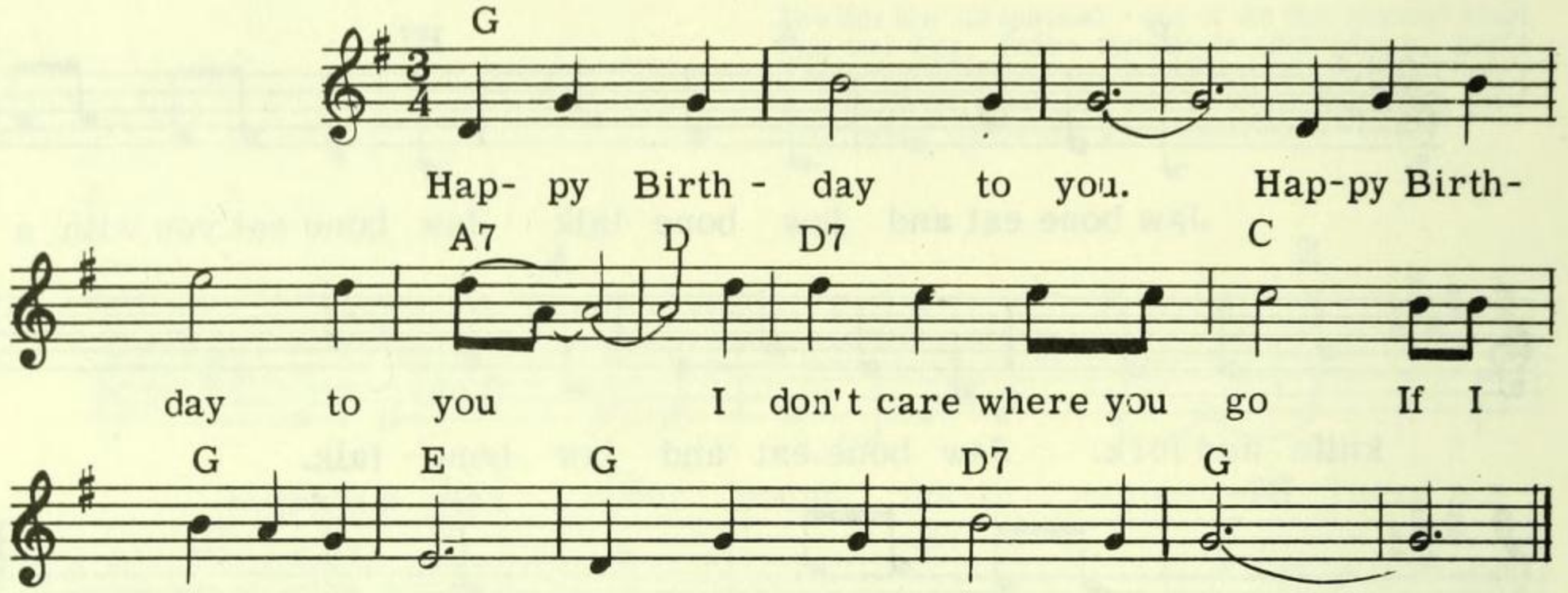
Corn bread rough and corn bread
tough,
Thank Godamighty got corn bread
enough.
Corn bread rough and corn bread
tough,
Thank Godamighty got corn bread
enough.

Old man laid in a forest shack,
Hog came along and broke his back.
Old man laid in a forest shack,
Hog came along and broke his back.



Happy Birthday

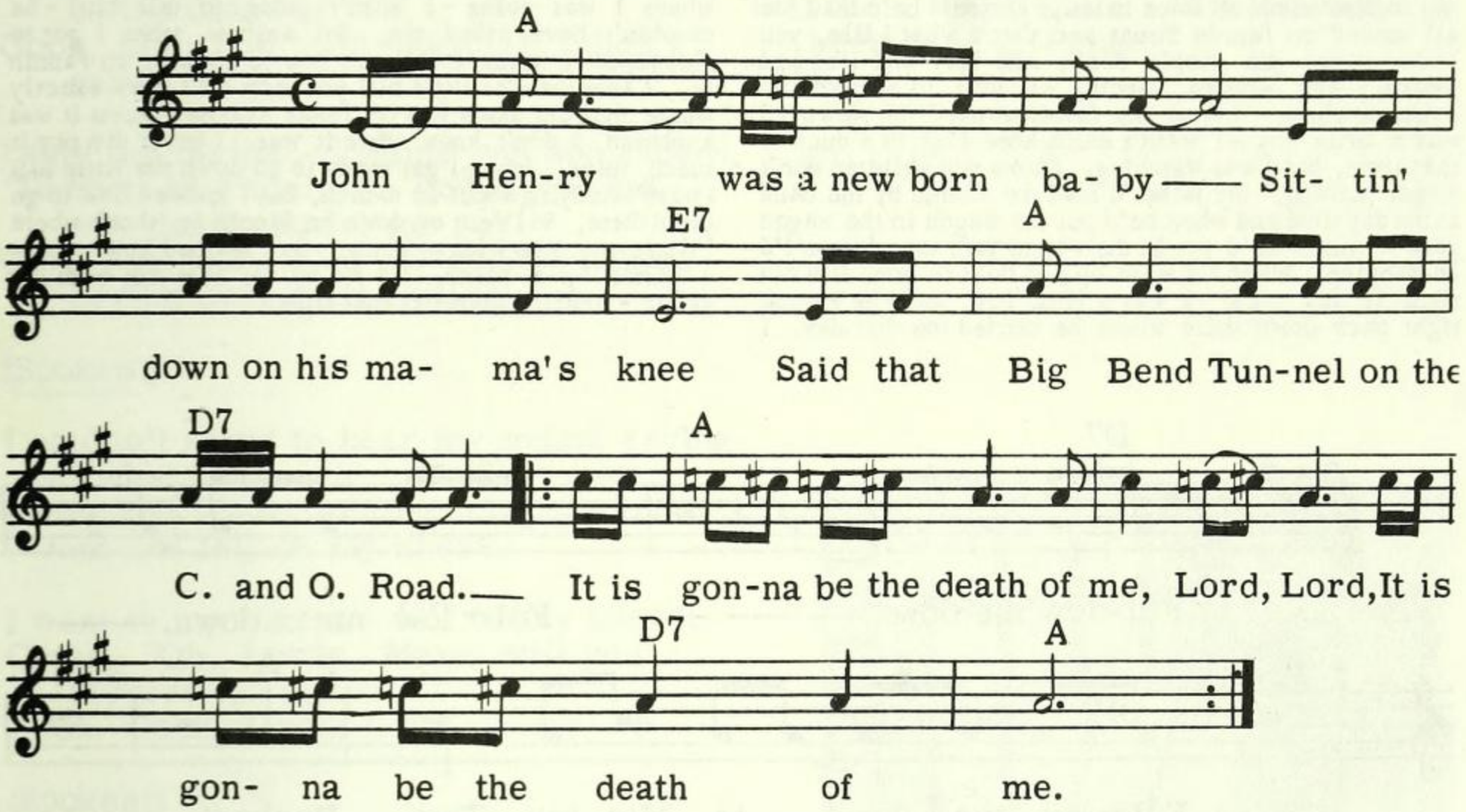
Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.


G
Hap- py Birth - day to you. Hap-py Birth-
A7 D D7 C
day to you I don't care where you go If I
G E G D7 G
have to say so. Hap- py Birth - day to you.

John Henry

New words and New Music arrangement by
Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Now John Henry, you know, it's made up by the hard working men folks. Don't forget it. Any time you hear anybody singing John Henry it's a dance tune if they play it right. John Henry came from Newport News. Mr. Lomax and myself we drove all round the spot where John Henry was borned at. That's the reason why they say that "C&O Road" - that road runs out from Newport News to Cincinnati, Ohio. John Henry was a man drove steel - he drove spikes on all the steel that was laid from Newport News to Cincinnati, Ohio. Now that's true. Ella Louise was a track liner. She come behind John Henry, she lined the track with 8 men. She lined all that track. And when Ella Louise went out lining track in come the train oozing on up to her. The whole thing come - the Rock Island Line. She kept ahead of the train - they didn't start the train until she was out. She had to be out when the train come. But anyhow the train would ooze along and the track was alright. Now this is John Henry and it's a dance tune and we dance it down home and I'm gonna play it for you.


A
John Hen-ry was a new born ba- by —— Sit- tin'
E7
A
down on his ma- ma's knee Said that Big Bend Tun-nel on the
D7
A
C. and O. Road.— It is gon-na be the death of me, Lord, Lord, It is
D7
A
gon- na be the death of me.

John Henry had two women,
One was named Mary Magdalene.
She would go out on the job and she would sing
To hear John Henry's hammer ring...

John Henry had another little woman
Her name it was Polly Ann.
John Henry taken sick and he had to go to bed.

Spoken:

Before John Henry died he called Polly Ann to his bedside. He wasn't thinking about Mary Magdalene. This is what he wanted Polly Ann to tell him before he died:

Tell me, who's gonna shoe your little feet,
Tell me, who's gonna glove your hand.
Tell me, who's gonna kiss your sweet little lips,
Tell me, who's gonna be your man...

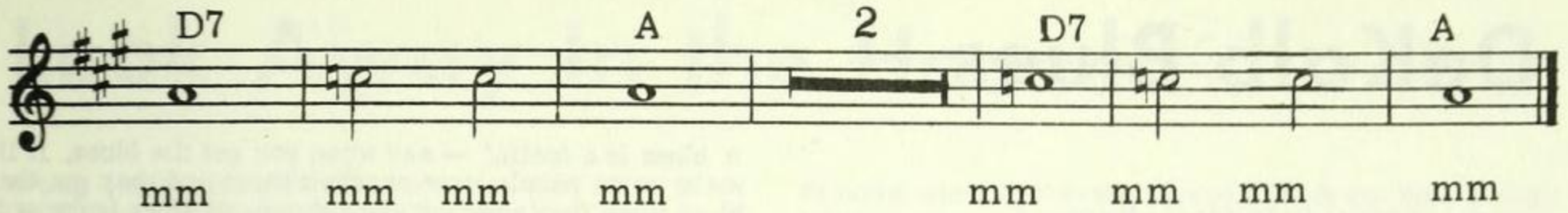
My pappa's gonna shoe my little feet,
My mama's gonna glove my hand.
My sister's gonna kiss my sweet little lips.
You know I don't need no man...

Well, they taken John Henry to the whitehouse
And they buried him in the sand,
And every locomotive comes a-roaring by says,
"There lies a steel-driving man".

Fannin Street

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Down home they call it "Fannin Street" but out in California they call it, "Cry For Me". That's my mother crying for me. You know, when I was a boy I had on short pants. My father used to take me to town on some cotton. We was living out in the country - which I was born dead in the country about 20 miles, and 30 and 40 miles from any kind of big town. Closest little place around us was 5 miles. We had to ride 5 miles to get mail and get it once a week. Read a newspaper once a week, and that was good..in that neighborhood..Anyhow, my papa take me to Shreveport on some bales of cotton - he'd lead me all around on Fannin Street and that's what I like, you know, where the people dance and play and sing and pianos...and women dancing - I love to see women dance anyhow. And so my father carried me down - I was a little boy - I wasn't much knee-high to a duck at that time, but I was watching. Shows you children don't forget nothing. My father'd lead me around by the hand in the day time and when he'd put the wagon in the wagon yard at night he'd put in the wagon yard too, 'cause I'd be sleeping. When I'd wake up and he'd be gone it'd run right in my mind - I was a little boy, too - he's gone right back down there where he carried me that day. I said, "Well, when I get to be a man I'm goin' down there too." And when I got to be about 16, 17 years old - see, I was wearing long pants at that time - so my father put me a bale of cotton and carried me to the train and gave me 40 dollars in my pocket. I was a big shot, sure, when I had that $40. Sent me to go to the fair five times, and he said, "Son don't go down on Fannin St." And I didn't sleep none that night just thinking about Fannin St. And I told him, "Nossir, papa", and that's just where I was going. I didn't have to tell him - he didn't have to know where I was going - I wasn't going to tell him - he shouldn't have asked me. But anyhow, when I got to Shreveport I never did forget how to go down on Fannin St., Cause there's a little hill you drop off I knew exactly where that big place was on Texas Avenue - guess it was a church, I don't know what it was. I never did pay it much mind. When I get ready to go down the little hill I wasn't studying about no church, but I knowed how to go down there. So I went on down on Fannin St. ther's where I'd go every time I leave home. So I learned how to play a guitar by a piano. I'd sit by the bass side with my guitar - 6-string guitar at that time.



My mama told me - my little sister too
Women on Fannin St., son, they gonna
be the death of you.
Oooh, ooh, ooh, ooh (spoken: I didn't
care)

I told my mama - "Mama you don't know,
"Women on Fannin St. gonna kill me
why don't you let me go".
Ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh. (She commenced
crying over what I said)

(Spoken:)

I couldn't stand to hear my mama crying
over what I had said. Me Being so
young and tender and born to surrender.
I went and fell on my knees.

I went to my mama - fell on my knees,
Cryin, "Oh, Lordy, Mama will you
forgive me please?"
Oooh, Oooh, Oooh, Oooh,

(Spoken:)

Commenced crying myself

Oooh...

(Spoken:)

I wanted her to know what side of town
I's running on when I leave home so
she wouldn't worry about me when
I'm gone.

I got a woman living on Stoney Hill,
Been running all over town with Buffalo
Bill.
Oooh, ooh, ooh, ooh,

Spoken:

(You's a bad man)

You been running all over town with
Buffalo Bill,
It's a wonder baby that you ain't done
got killed.
Ooh...

Spoken:
(Commenced crying myself)

Oooh...

Anybody should ask you people who made
up this song,
Tell them that Huddie Ledbetter done
been here and gone.
Oooh...

DeKalb Blues

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

A blues is a feelin' — and when you get the blues, it'll make some people wear out their shoes and they got the blues when they wear out their shoes and blues is the sad news.

Wasn't for the powder and the straightening comb
Wasn't for the powder and the straightening comb
Lord, them de Kalb women would not have no home.

Blues was whiskey I would get drunk all the time (2)
Lord, it takes long, baby, to wear you off my mind.

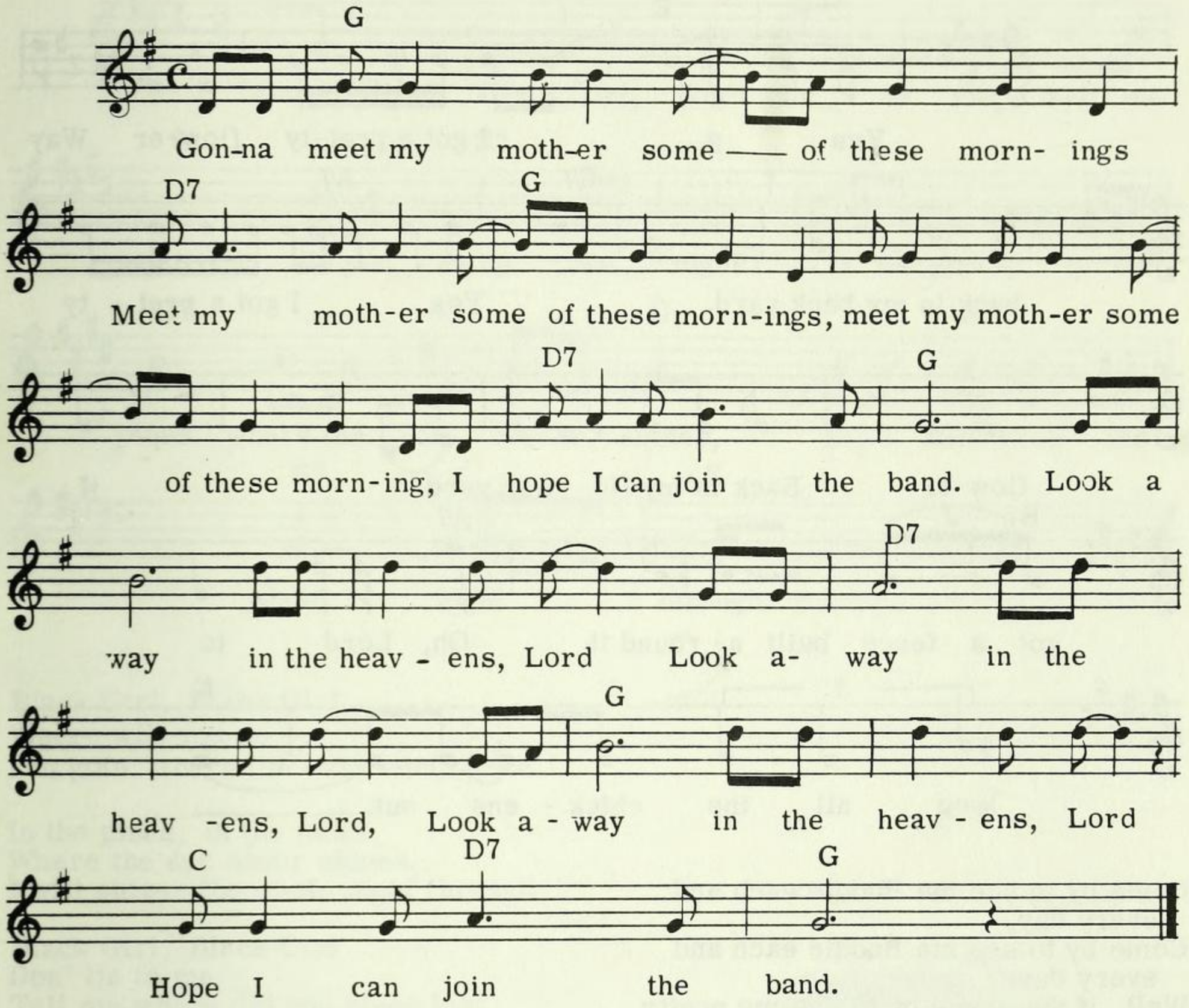
Feel like walking, feel like talking here (2)
Lord, I need some woman to take me 'way from here.

Look here woman, see what you done done (2)
You made me love you, now your man done come.

Look Away In the Heaven

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

At home when I go to the Baptist Church the Sisters in the amen corner, they always lead out.


G
Gon-na meet my moth-er some —— of these morn- ings
D7
G
Meet my moth-er some of these morn-ings, meet my moth-er some
D7
G
of these morn-ing, I hope I can join the band. Look a
D7
way in the heav - ens, Lord Look a- way in the
G
heav -ens, Lord, Look a - way in the heav - ens, Lord
C
D7
G
Hope I can join the band.

Gonna meet my mother some of these
mornings,
Meet my mother some of these
mornings,
Meet my mother some of these
mornings,
I hope I can join the band.

Chorus

..... sister .....

Chorus

Pretty Flower

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

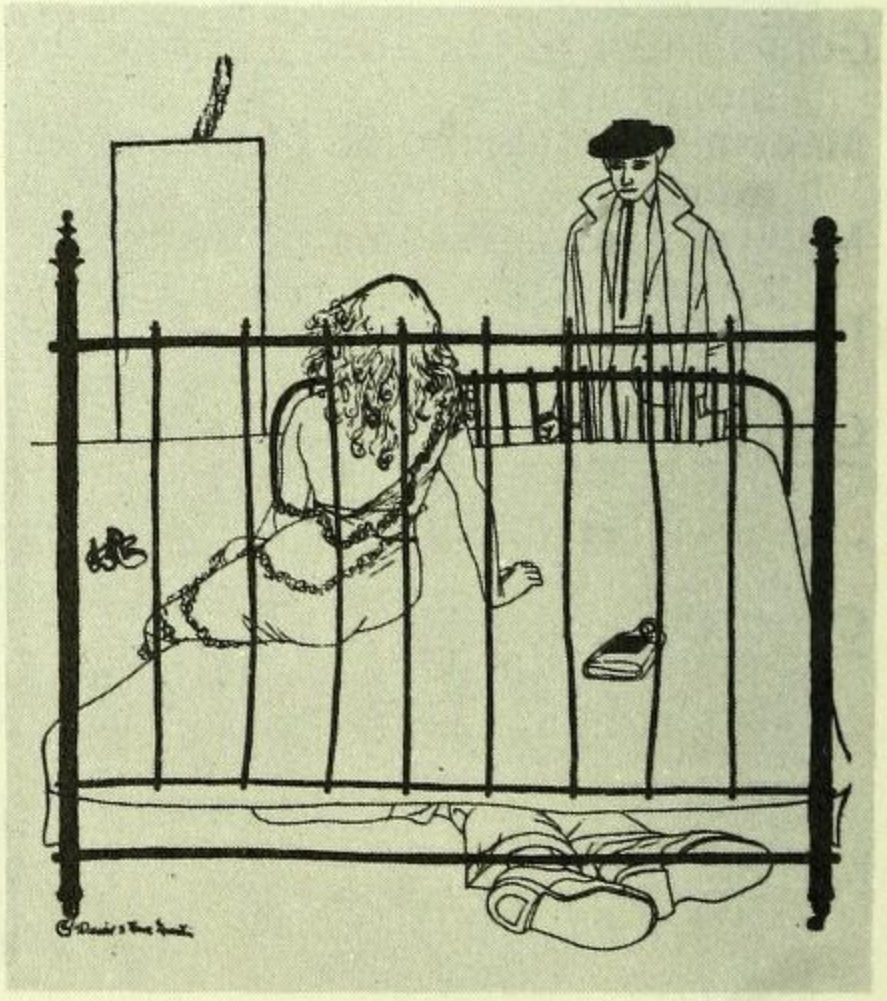
E
Yes I got a pret-ty flow-er Way
E7 A7
back in my back yard. Yes I got a pret - ty
E
flow-er Back in my flo -wer yard I
B7 3 A7
got a fence built a- round it Oh, Lord to
3 E
keep all the chick - ens out.

Come by to see me Huddie each and
every day,
Come by to see me Huddie each and
every day,
Well, if you come by to see my pretty
flower
Well, you sure better stay away.

You got the same kind of flower I got,
why do you wanna bother mine?
You got the same kind of flower I got,
why do you wanna bother mine?
Tend to yours and treat them just right
That would be just fine.

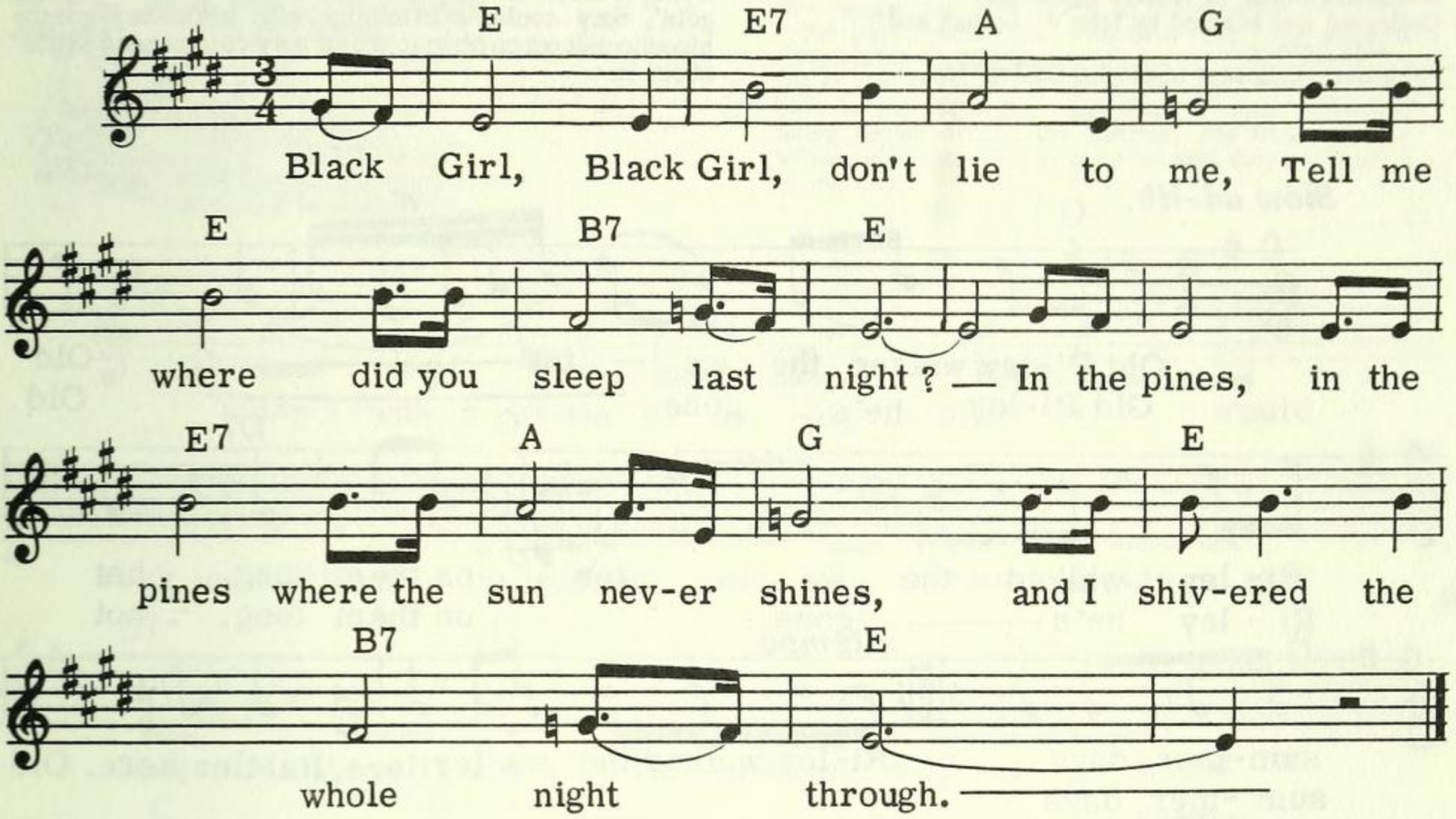
Water my flower every morning and
evening 'fore the sun goes down,
Water my flower every morning and
evening 'fore the sun goes down,
Let me tell you one thing, Ledbetter,
I got the sweetest flower in this town.

You can't tell me how to treat my pretty
flower, (what I mean) I got my own way,
You can't tell me how to treat my pretty
flower, I got my own way,
I'm gonna treat my little flower so good,
ooh, Lord,
My back yard'll be so nice and gay.



Black Girl

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.


E E7 A G
Black Girl, Black Girl, don't lie to me, Tell me
E B7 E
where did you sleep last night ? — In the pines, in the
E7 A G E
pines where the sun nev-er shines, and I shiv-ered the
B7 E
whole night through.

Black Girl, Black Girl
Where will you go
I'm goin' where the cold wind blows.

In the pines, in the pines,
Where the sun never shines,
I will shiver the whole night through.

Black Girl, Black Girl
Don' lie to me
Tell me where did you sleep last
night.

In the pines, in the pines
Where the sun never shines,
I was shiver' the whole night
through.

My husband was
A railroad man
Killed a mile and a half from here.

His head was found
In the driver's wheel
And his body haven't never been
found.

Black Girl, Black Girl
Where will you go
I'm goin' where the cold wind blows.

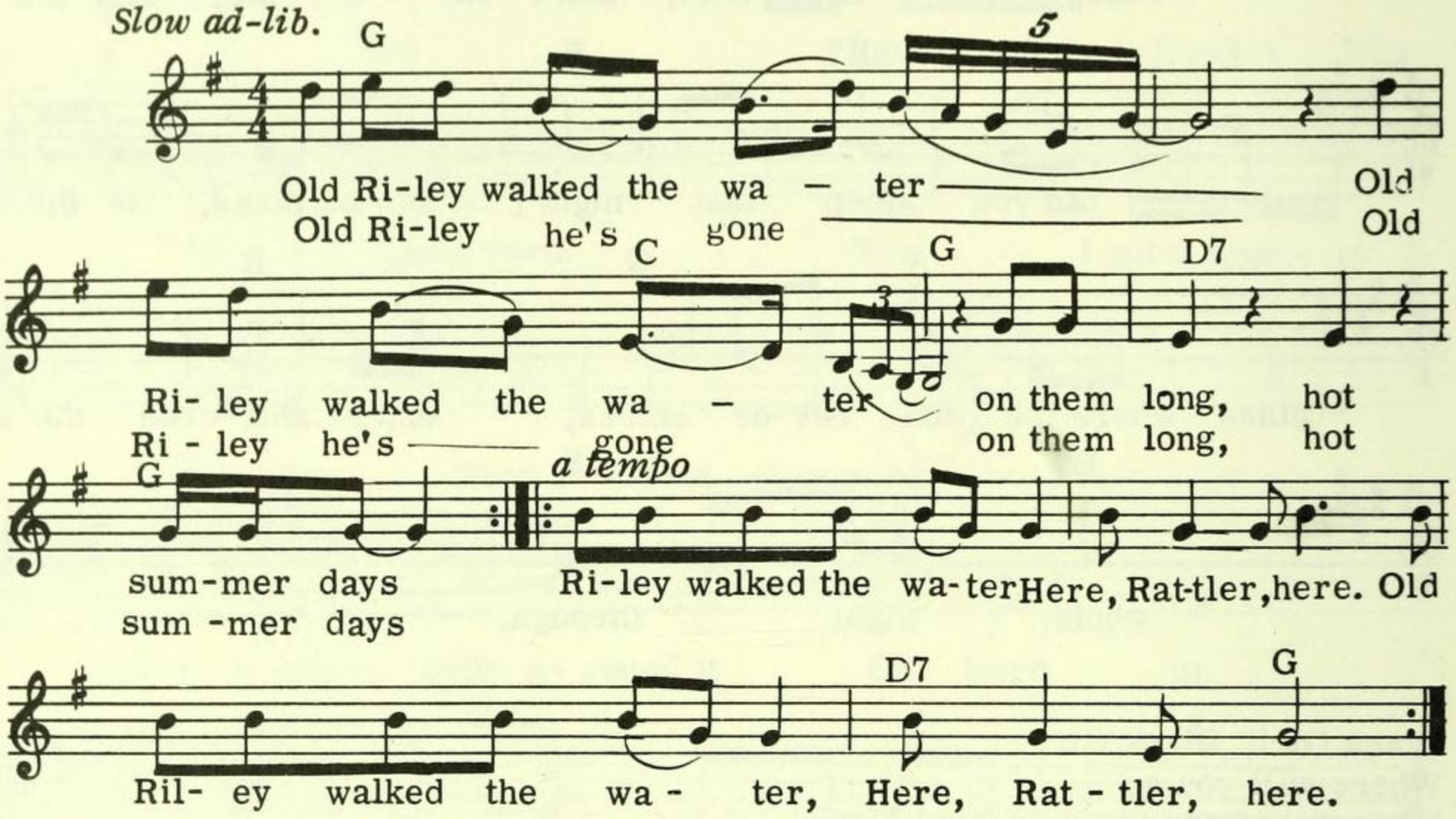
You caused me to weep
And you caused me to moan
You caused me to leave my home.

Phillis Wheatley, American Poet

Old Riley

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and
Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Now this is Riley. They had bloodhounds in them times... The overseer in them times had a Negro named Riley. And Old Riley was one of the best there was and old Riley was trying to make his way to freedom. And while Riley was goin', they couldn't catch up with him, they got the bloodhounds put on his tracks and they commenced talkin' about it.



Riley gone like a turkey through the
corn,
Here, Rattler, here.
Riley gone like a turkey through the
corn,
Here rattler, here.

Old Rattler come when I blow my horn,
Here, Rattler, here...

Toot, toot, toot,
Here, Rattler, here...

Old Rattler got him a marrow bone,
Here, Rattler, here...

Old Riley's gone like a turkey through
the corn,
Here, Rattler, here...

Here, Rattler - Here, Rattler,
Here, Rattler, here...

(sung to melody of intro.)

Old Riley walked the water.
Old Riley walked the water.
On them long, hot summer days.

Cotton Song

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

"At eighteen I banished away and went out in West Texas, pickin' cotton. I had a friend Clarence Ruffin' who taught me how to go to four-hundred and fifty. 1,000 pound picker don't look back at it. Now this is a little children's play song down South. The sun shines so hot in the day time until they can't pick cotton. They have to pick at night. And when th little children is fixing supper around the fireside, the little children would play in the yard at night because they could sleep in the day.

G
When I was a lit-tle ba- by my moth- er would
C G
rock me in the cra-dle in them old, old cot-ton fields at
D7 G
home. When I was a lit-tle ba-by my moth-er would
C G D7
rock me in the cra-dle in them old cot - ton fields at
G C
home. Oh, when them cot-ton balls get rot - ten you could- n't
G
pick ve- ry much cot-ton, in them old cot - ton fields at
D7 G
home. It was down in Lou' - si - a - na, Just a
C G D7 G
mile from Tex - ar - ka - na, in them old cot-ton fields at home.

It may sound a little funny,
But you didn't make very much money
In them old cotton fields at home.
It may sound a little funny,
But you didn't make very much money
In them old cotton fields at home

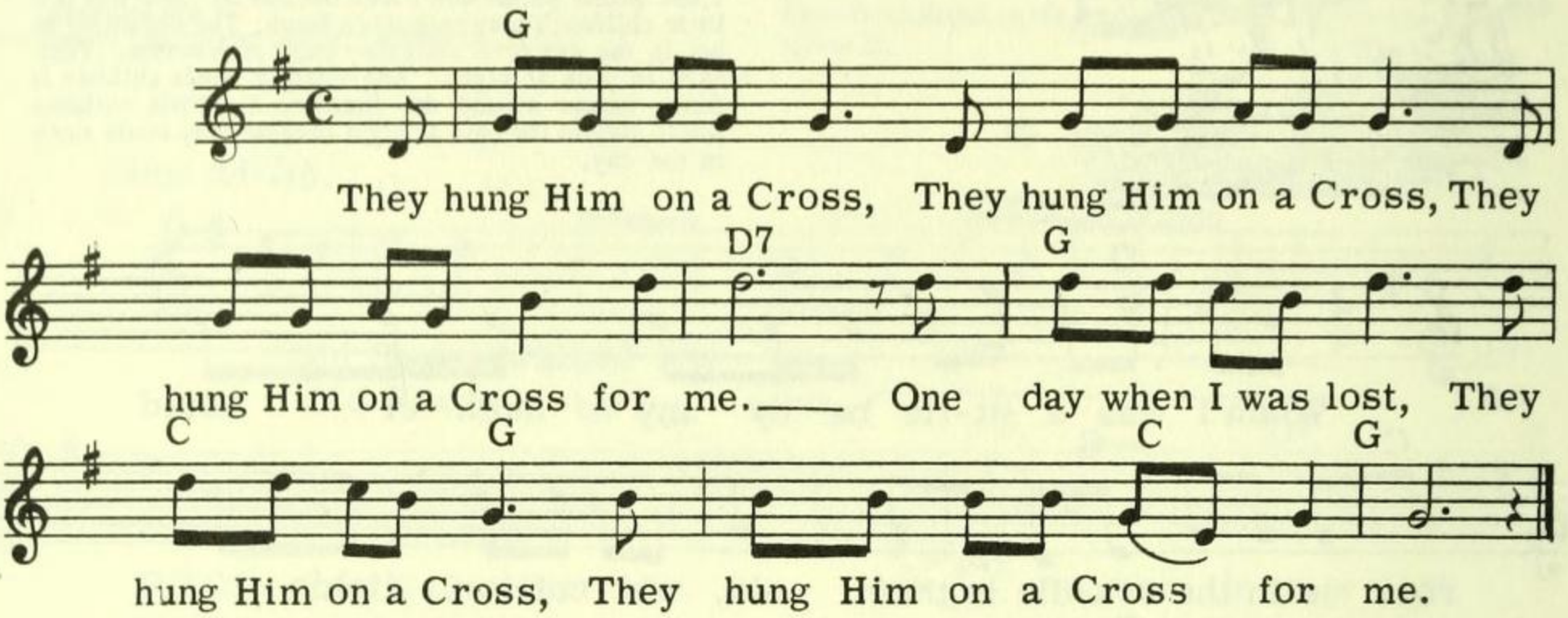
Chorus

I was over in Arkansas,
People ask me, What you come here
for -
In them old cotton fields at home...

Chorus

They Hung Him On a Cross

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.


G
They hung Him on a Cross, They hung Him on a Cross, They
D7
G
hung Him on a Cross for me. One day when I was lost, They
C
G
C
G
hung Him on a Cross, They hung Him on a Cross for me.

They whipped Him up the hill,
They whipped Him up the hill,
They whipped Him up the hill for me.
One day when I was lost,
They hung Him on a cross,
And they whipped him up the hill for me.

They speared Him in the side...

Well you know the Holy Ghost people have got their own way to sing if they have to sing — and they sing:

And the blood come streaming down...

He hung His head and died...

He never said a mumblin' word....

He's coming back again...

Salty Dog

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

God made a woman and he made her
might funny
When you kiss her round the mouth,
just as sweet as any honey.

Chorus

Scaredest I ever been in my life
When my buddy like to caught me
kissing his wife.

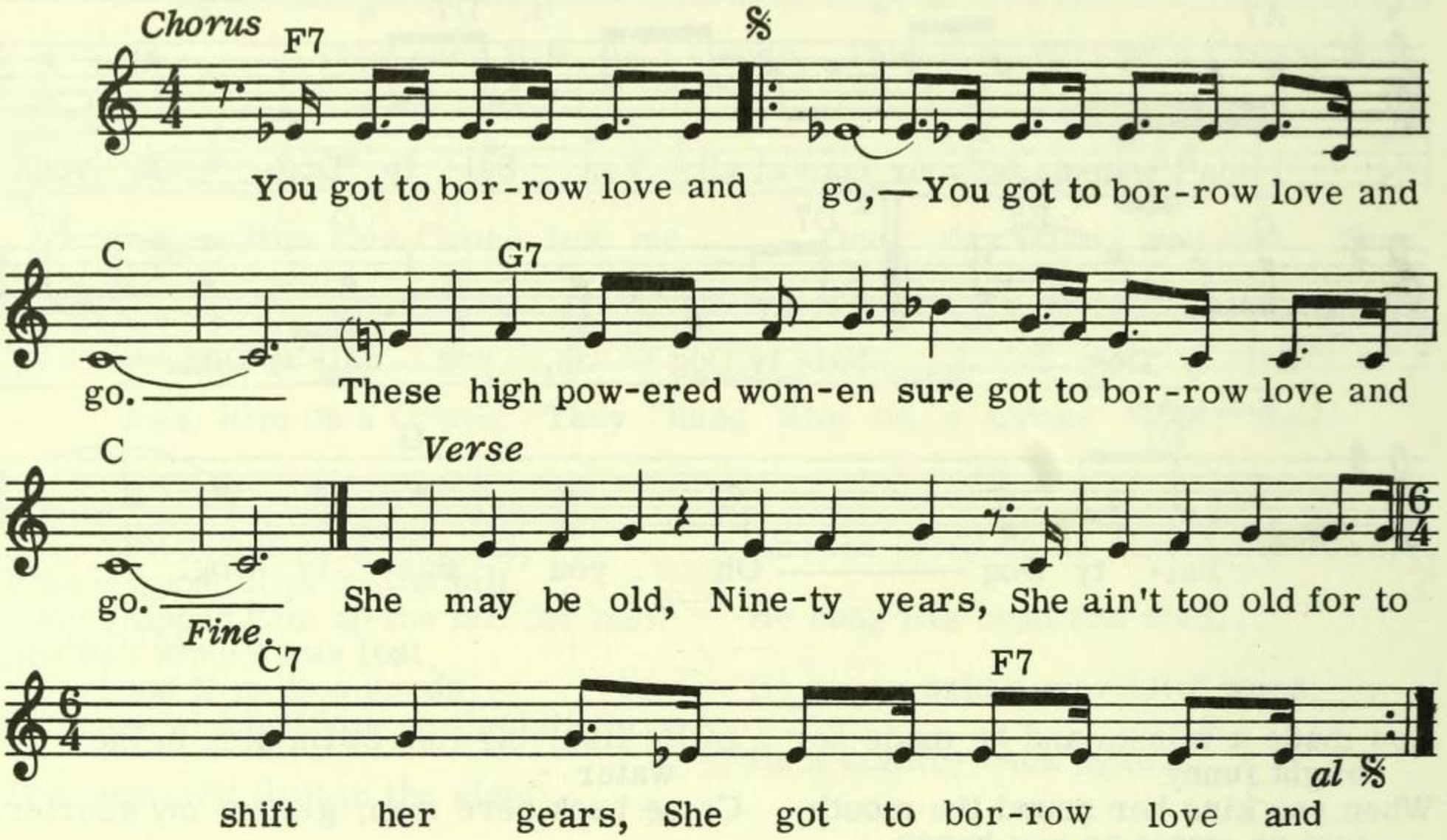
Little fish, big fish swimming in the
water
Come back here man, gimme my quarter.

Chorus

Borrow Love and Go

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Now this here is Borrow Love and Go. I don't care when you go. When you get ready to leave you just tell the people: "I'm gonna borrow love and go." And this means about the high-powered women, 'cause we got women that can drive airplanes, got radio women, they can do most anything a man can do. That's what you mean they can Borrow Love and Go.



I tol' my baby late las' night
Ain't none a-my business; she ain't
doin' me right

Tol' my baby, week before last
The gait she's keepin'; just a little
too fast

Nickle is a nickle, dime is a dime
Need a new girl; she won't mind

Mama killed a chicken, thought it was
a duck
Put him on the table with his legs
stickin' up

Well, I jumped in the river and I
couldn't get across
I jumped on an alligator - thought it
was a horse

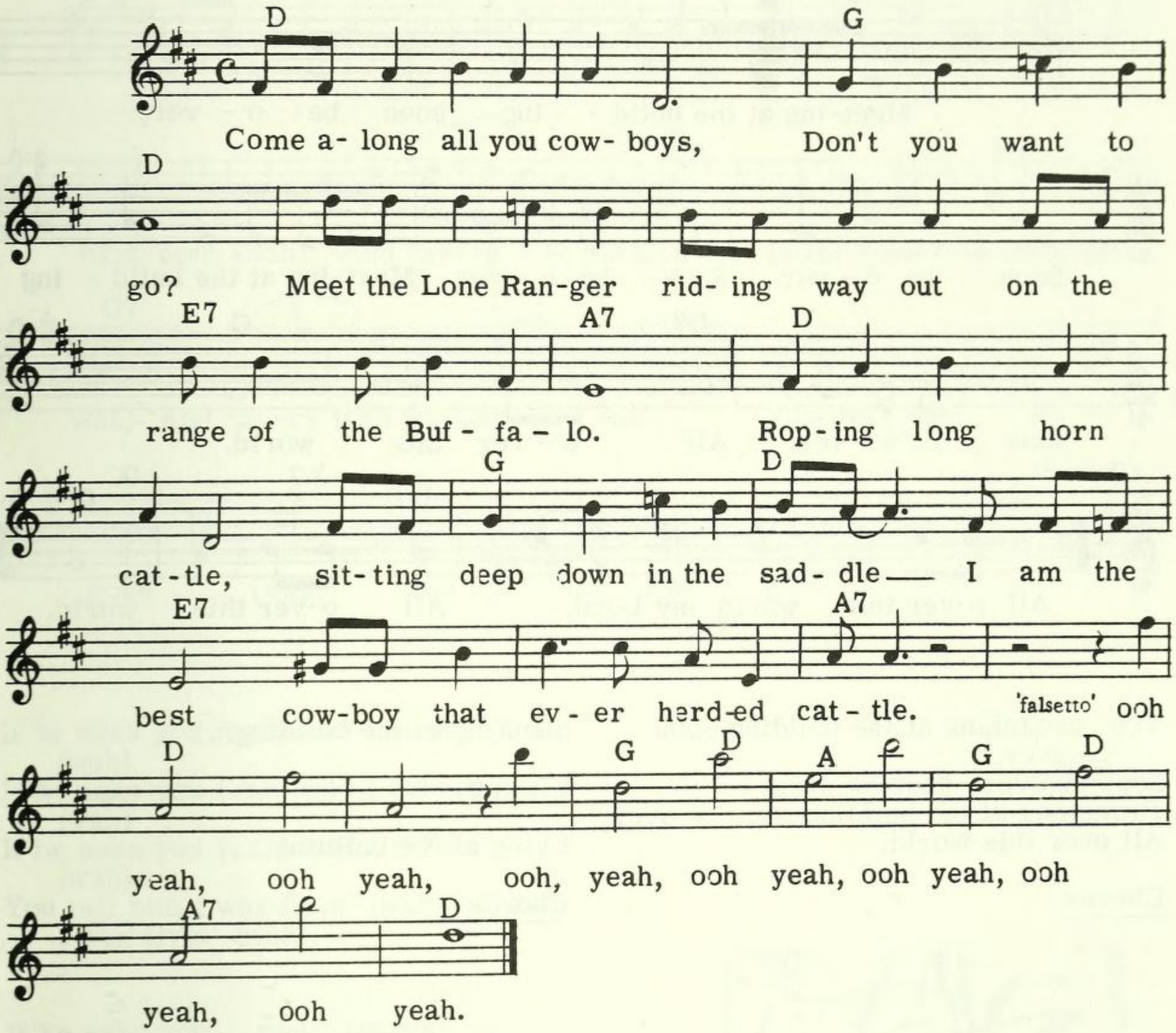
She may be old, ninety years
She ain't too old to shift her gears

I jumped in the river and I started
to drown
I thought about my gal and I turned
around.

Come Along All You Cowboys

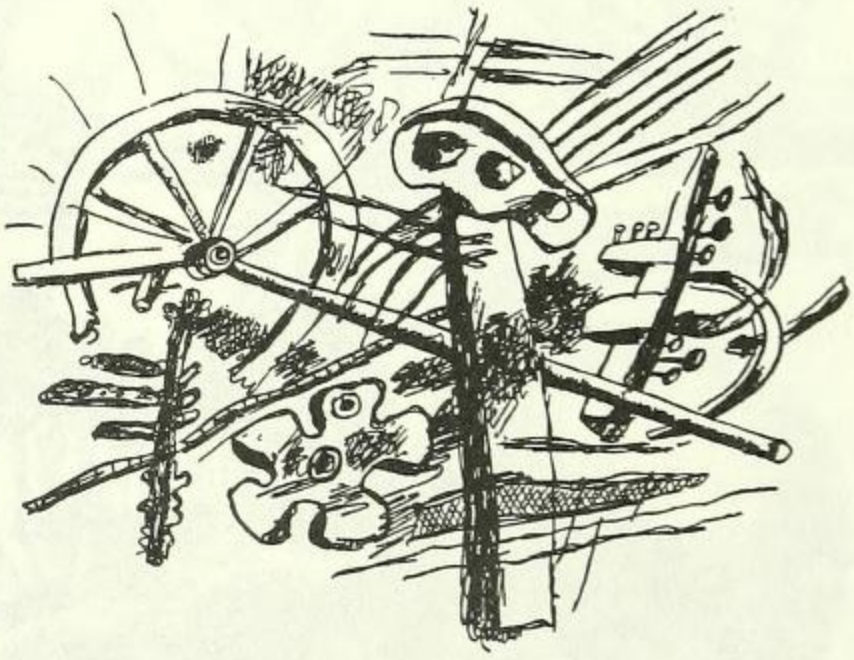
Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

During the Civil War, the shortage of men made the ranch owners hire Negro ranch hands. Leadbelly told me that when he was in the Panhandle (Texarkana) he also did ranch work. - M. Asch



Many long years I rambled, drank corn
likker in Istanbul,
But one day I thought that I would settle
down.
I met two pretty looking ladies; one said,
"Don't you want to be my baby?"
I thought I would build me a cottage in
the old home town. (Cho.)

I rode up to my gals house, she was
sitting inside alone.
I said I'm a poor western cowboy and
a great long way from home.
When I leave my gals house she was
rocking in the rocking chair,
She said, "If you go in the house will
you leave me a dime for beer?"
(Cho.)



Meeting At the Building

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

"When the Baptist people down south get together in the church they sing — they just sing, they don't swing, but they rock church."

G
Meet-ing at the build - ing soon be o - ver,
D7
G
Soon be o - ver Soon be o - ver. Meet-ing at the build - ing
D7
G
soon be o - ver. All o - ver this world.
Chorus
C
D7
G
All o-ver this world my Lord, - All o-ver this world.

Yes, preaching at the building soon
be over,
Soon be over, soon be over.
Preaching at the building soon be over,
All over this world.

Chorus

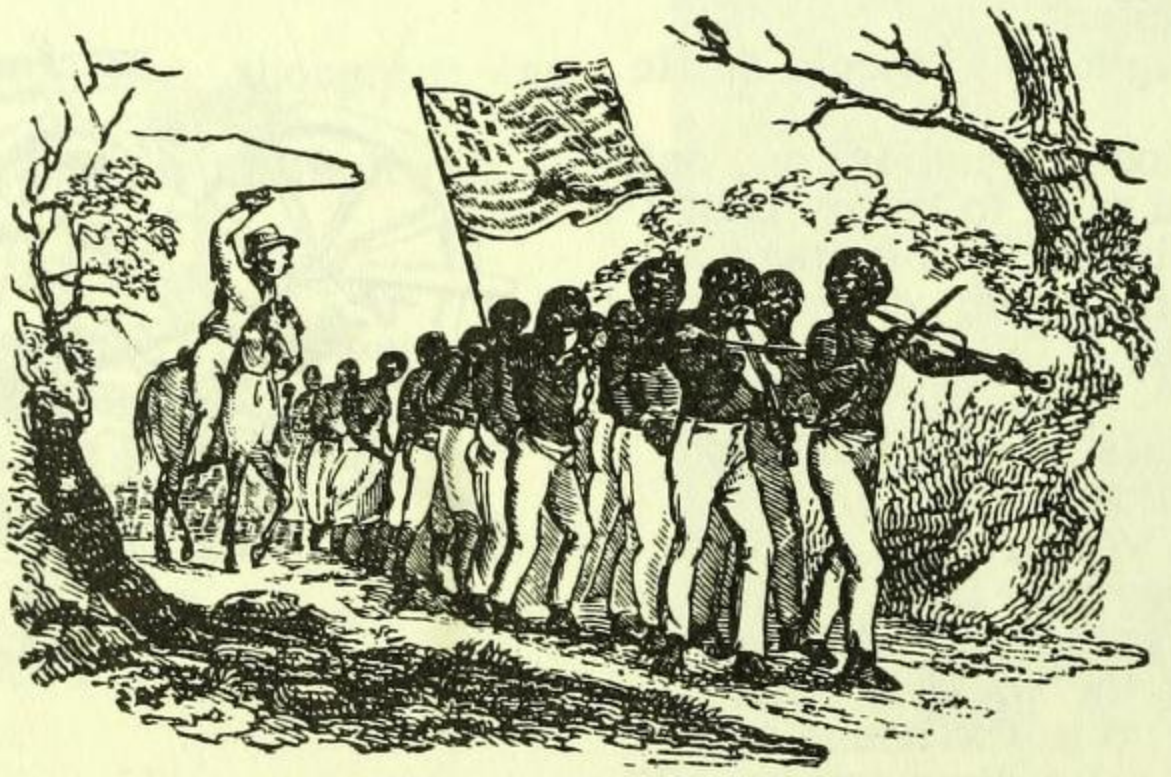
Shouting at the building...

Chorus

Lying at the building...

Chorus

"Hail Columbia! Happy Land!!!"



Take This Hammer

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

You gonna hear these hammers fall as these boys sing and swing. Take the hammer and give it to the man.

If he asks you (wah) was I runnin',
(wah)
If he asks you (wah) was I runnin',
(wah)
If he asks you (wah) was I runnin',
(wah)
You tell him I was flyin' (wah) tell him
I was flyin' (wah).

If he asks you...was I laughin'...
Tell him I was cryin'...

I don't want no...cold iron shackles...
Around my leg....

I don't want no corn bread, peas and
molasses...
Hurts my pride...

Whoa Buck

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

(There was a) man that was tryin' to get home. He was talking to his oxens. Ev'ry once in a while he'd pop his whip — "Ti-yow!"

Chorus

C F7 C
Whoa buck and gee, by the lamb. Who made the back band

F7 C F7
gee Cun-ning-ham. Whoa, Cun-ning-ham and Whoa Cun ning-ham

C F7 C
Who made the back band, Whoa, Cun-ning-ham. *Fine* Eight-een, nine-teen,

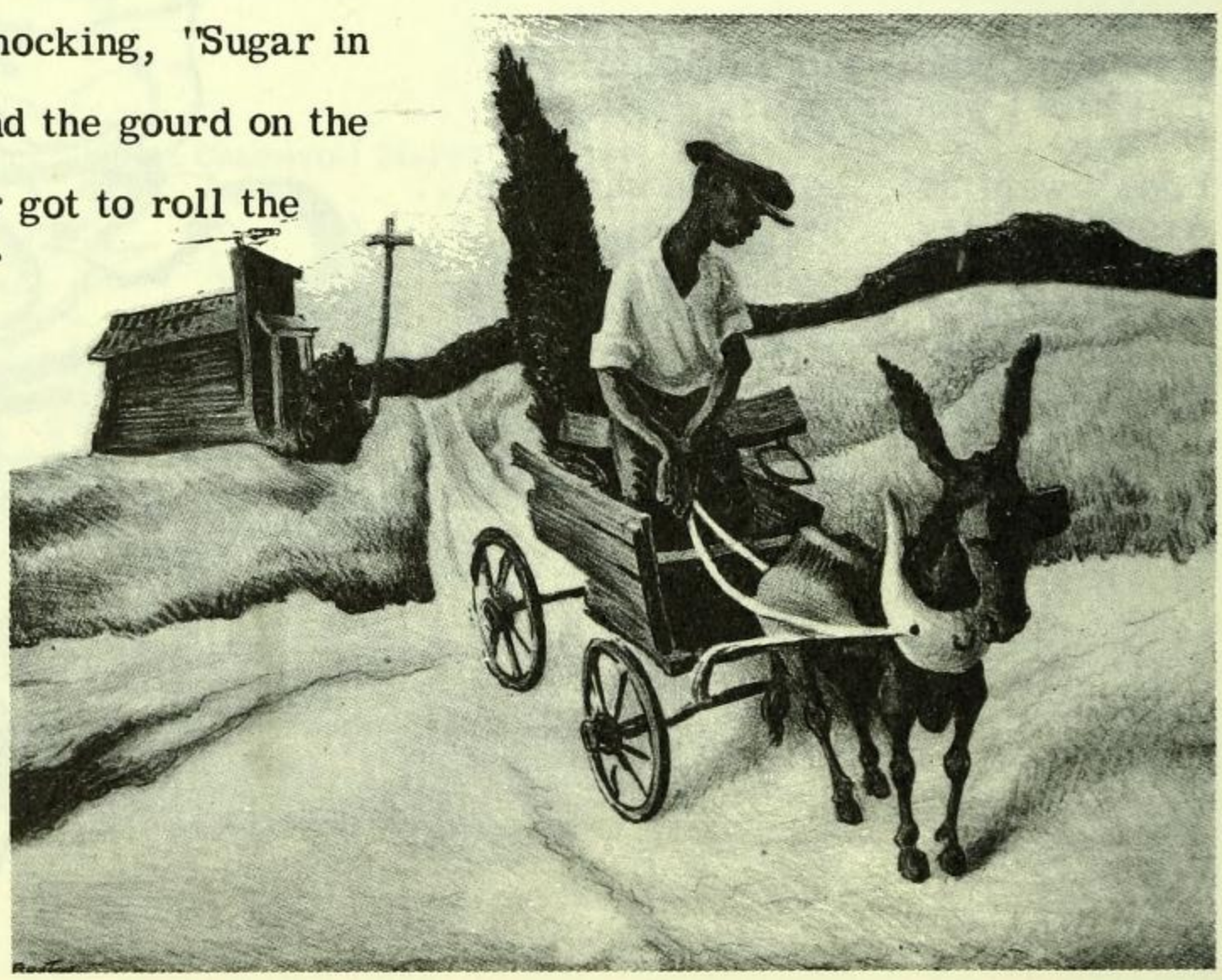
F7
twen-ty years a-go, tak-en my gal to a coun-try store.

C
tak-en my gal to a coun try store, I

F7 C
bought my gal some cal-i-co. spoken (Tack a whoa back a gee.)

Me and my gal come a walking down the road,
Wind from my feet knocking, "Sugar in the Gourd."
Sugar in the gourd and the gourd on the ground,
Want to get the sugar got to roll the gourd around.

Chorus



Cow Cow Yicky Yicky Yea

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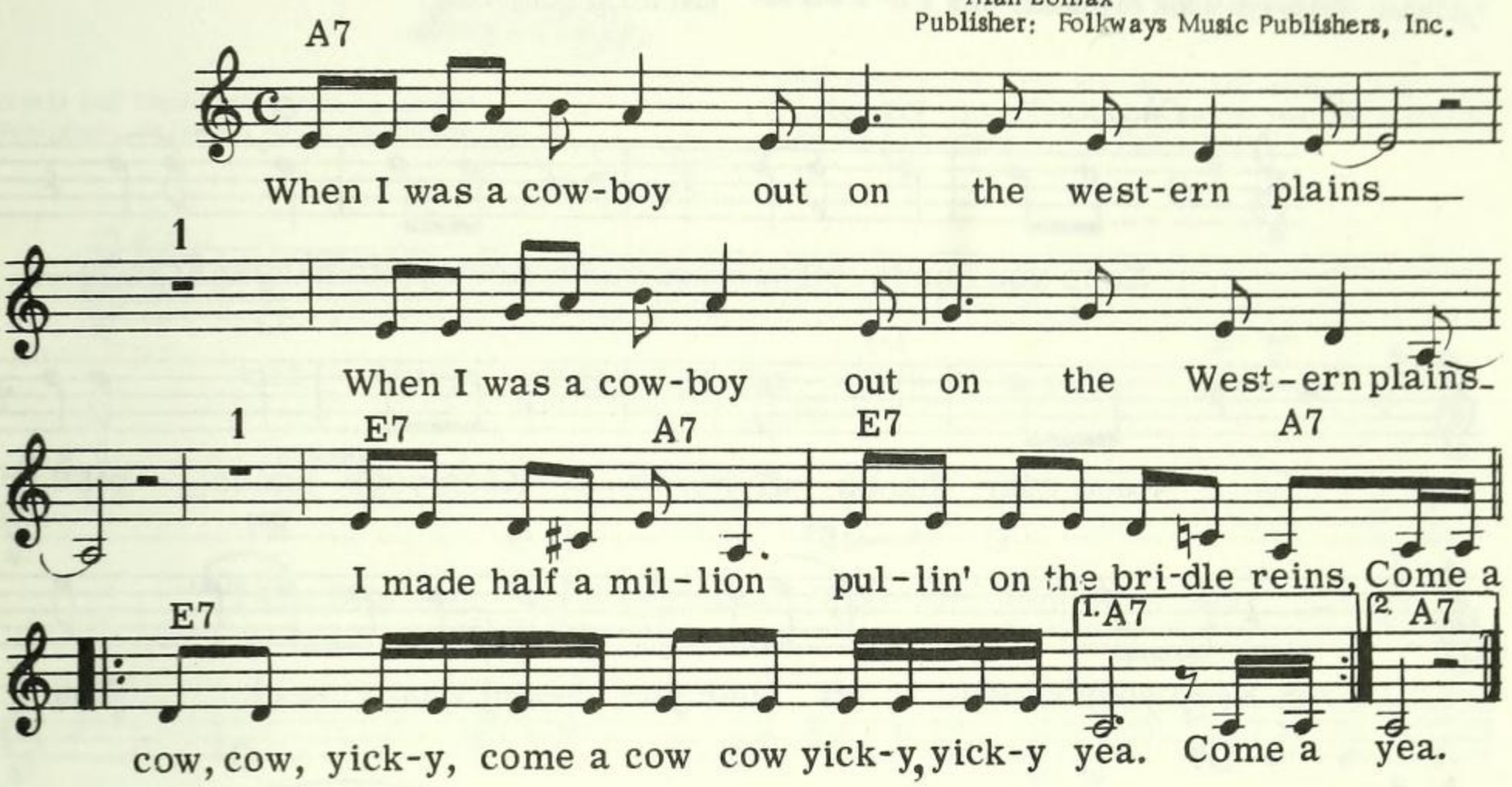

A7
When I was a cow-boy out on the west-ern plains
1
When I was a cow-boy out on the West-ern plains
1 E7 A7 E7 A7
I made half a mil-lion pul-lin' on the bri-dle reins, Come a
E7 1. A7 2. A7
cow, cow, yick-y, come a cow cow yick-y, yick-y yea. Come a yea.

Oh, the hardest battle was ever on the western plains
Oh, the hardest battle was ever on the western plains
When me and a bunch of cowboys run into Jesse James.

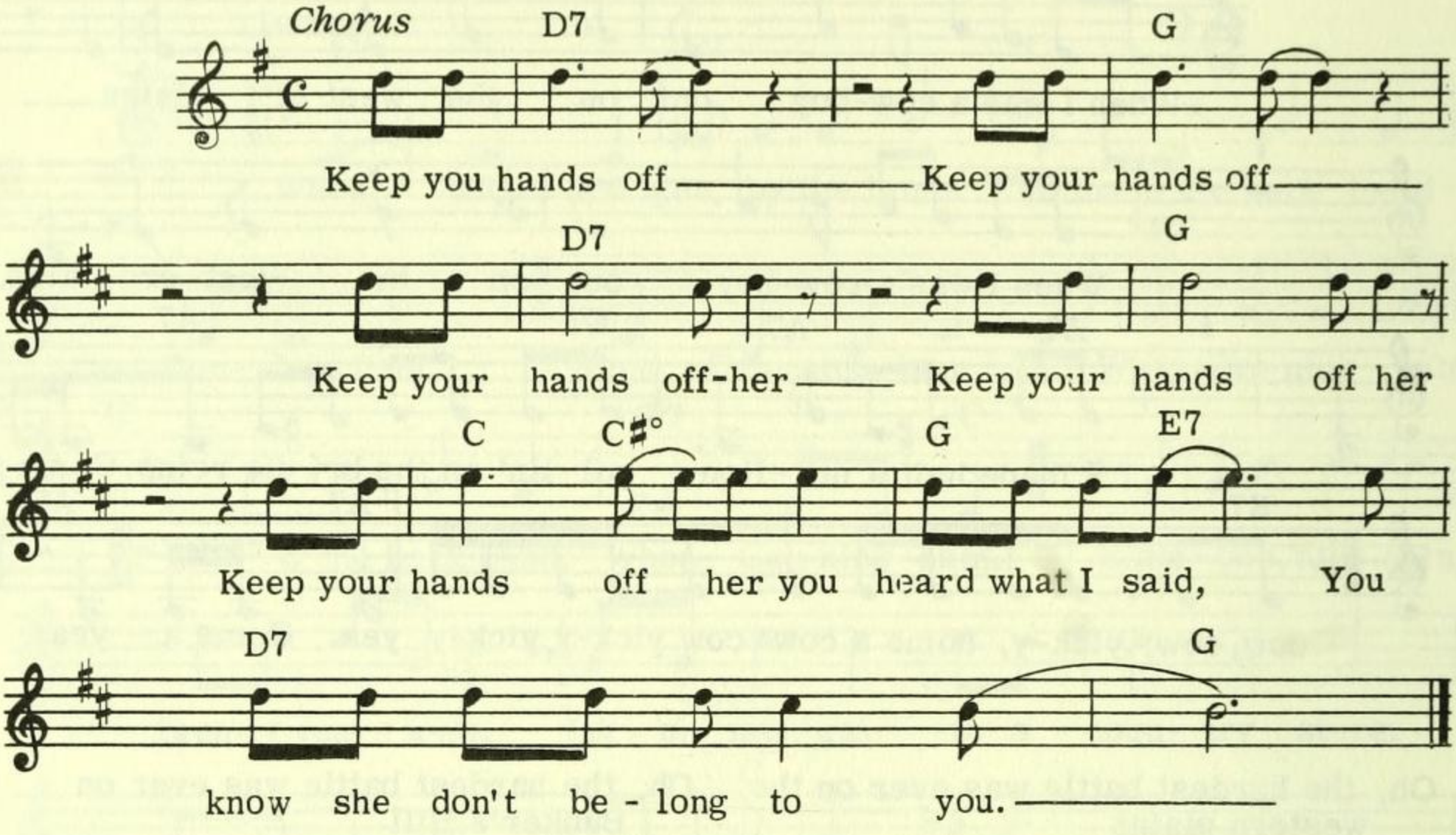
Chorus

Oh, the hardest battle was ever on Bunker's Hill
When me and a bunch of cowboys run into Buffalo Bill.

Chorus

Keep Your Hands Off Her

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.



She's a heavy hipted mama, she's got the great big legs
She's a heavy hipted mama, she's got the great big legs
She's a heavy hipted mama, she's got the great big legs
Walking like she's walking on soft-boiled eggs.

She wrote me a letter and that brought bad news; and that brought the blues.

Her name is Josie and she ain't so nosey (3)
But boy - she so cozy.

She's a heavy hipted mama and she's built up straight (3)
She got just what it takes.

Old Man Will Your Dog Catch a Rabbit?

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Now here come that big Bella Lee sailing down the Mississippi. You got to load it before you ride and sail. And the boys gonna load it this a-way.

E
Old Man, will your dog catch a rab - bit
Take him and try'm Take him and try'm Old
Man will your dog catch a rab – bit Take him and
A7
E
try'm, babe Take him and try'm Take him and
A7
E
try'm babe You can take him and try'm

Old man will your pony tow double?
I don't know, well, I don't know,
Old man will your pony tow double?
I don't know, well, I don't know.

Old man will your daughter take company?
I don't know, well, I don't know...

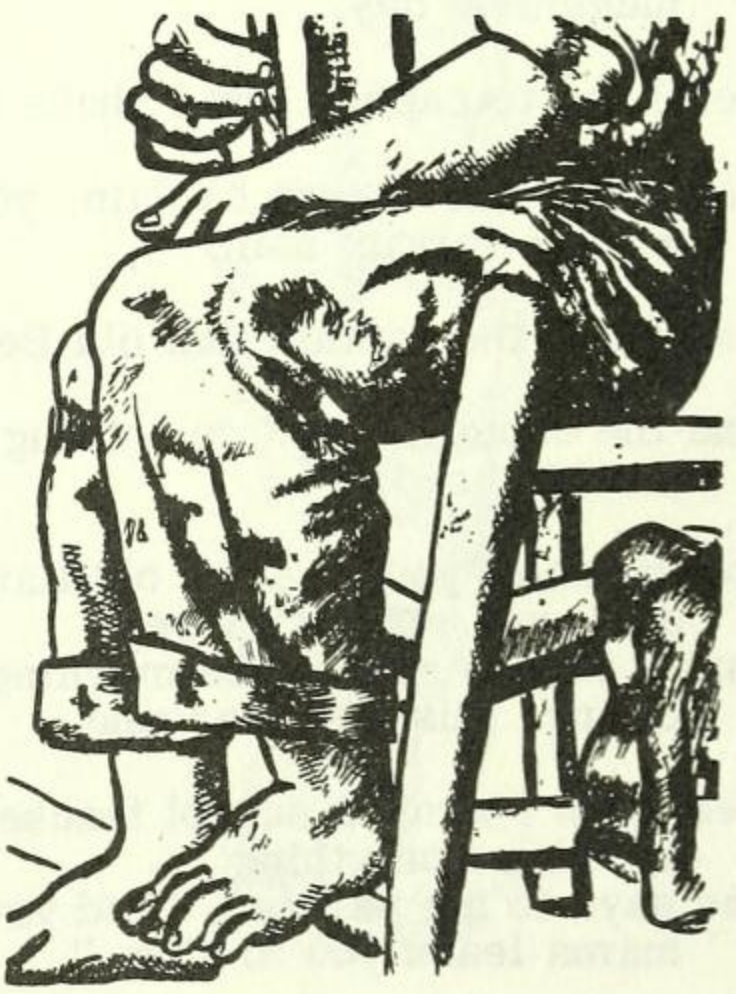
Old man does your daughter want to marry?
I don't know, buddy, well, I don't know...

Old man is your ship overloaded?
I don't know, well, I don't know...

Old man will your dog catch a possum?
I don't know, well, I don't know...

What you gonna do when the ship is leaving?
I don't know, well, I don't know...

I'm goin' down the road a-leaving.
I don't know buddy, I don't know...

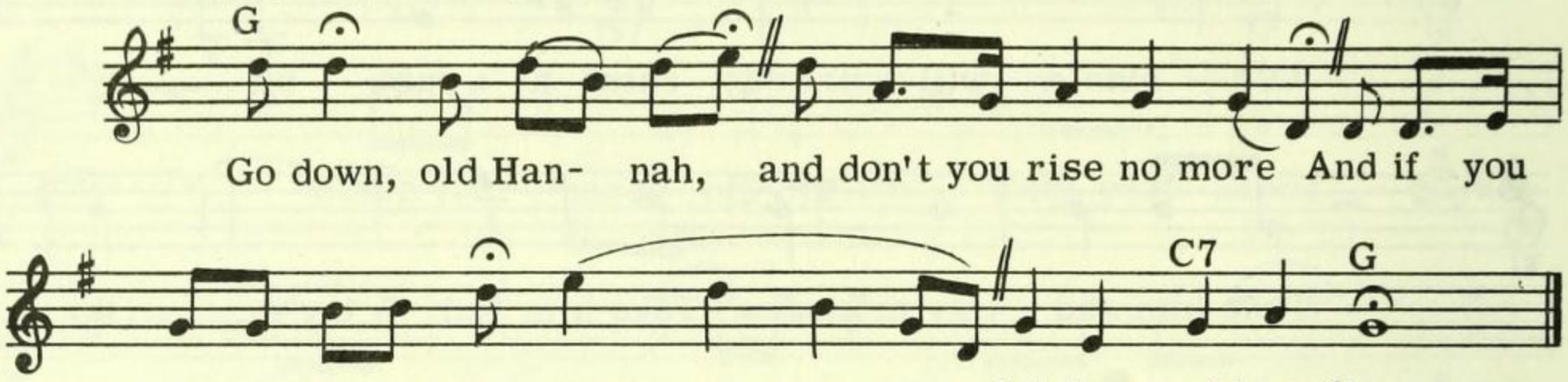


Go Down Old Hannah

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

They called the sun, Old Hannah because it was hot and they just give it a name. That's what the boys called it when I was down in prison. I didn't hear it before I went down there. The boys were talking about Old Hannah - I kept looking and I didn't see no Hannah, but they looked up and said, "That's the sun".

Chorus
Very freely- a capella



It was soon one morning when the sun did rise
I was thinking 'bout my good-looking baby - hang my head and cry.

Go down old Hannah, don't you rise no more
And if you rise in the morning, set this world on fire.

If you had been on the river somewhere in 1910,
They was driving the women just as hard as hard as they do the men.

You go down old Hannah and don't rise no more,
So if you rises in the morning bring judgement day.

Yes I run to captain and I shake his hand,
I says, "Look-a here captain, you got a hard workin' man.

And I told the captain that old Ben was dead
And the captain didn't do nothing but nod his head.

So why don't you go down old Hannah, don't you rise no more,
And if you do rise in the morning
Change this world around.

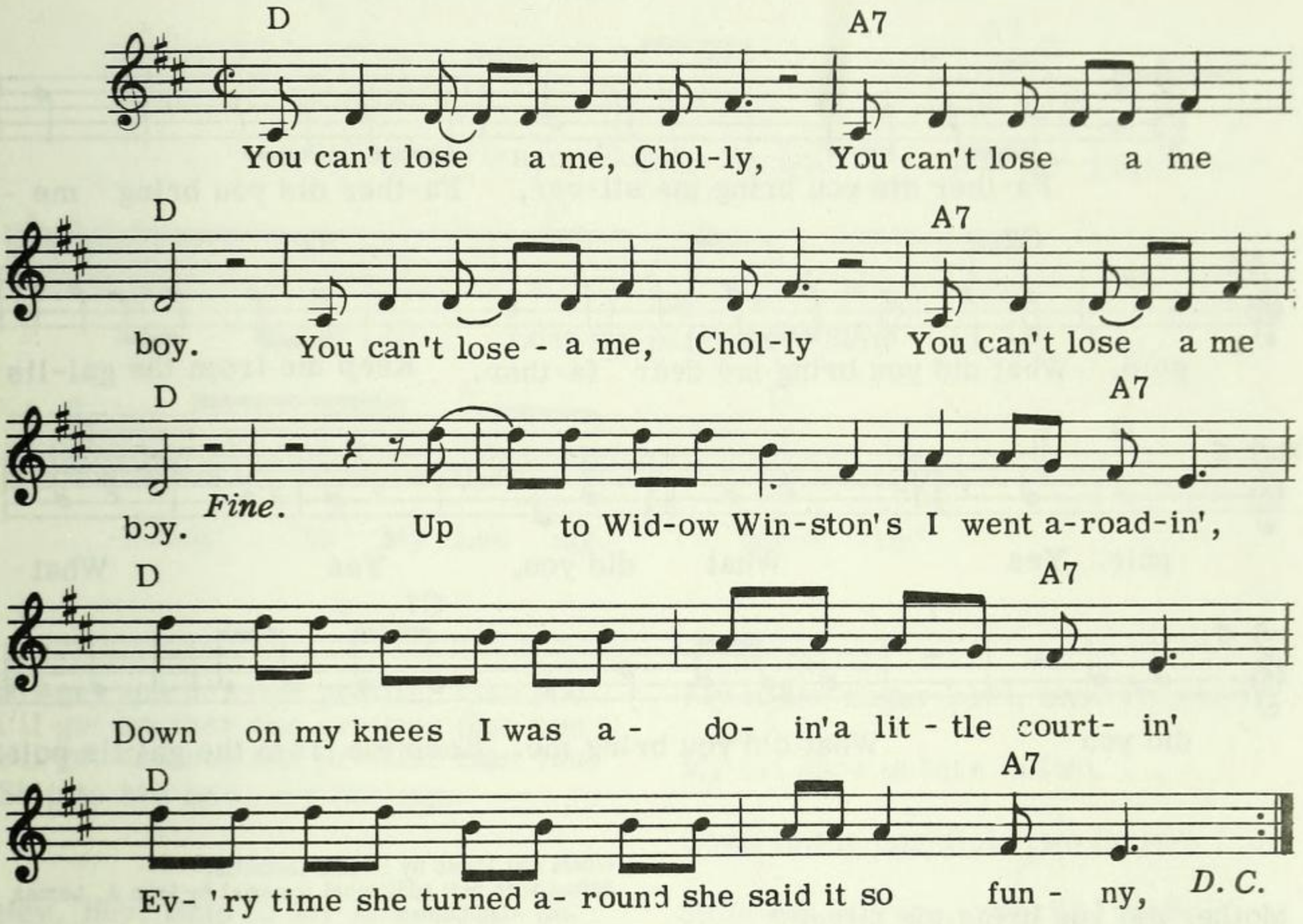
Yes when I went to school teacher asked me one thing
She says to me partner, "Did your mama learn you to sing."

And I says, "Go down down old Hannah and don't rise no more
And if you rise in the morning, I'd like to be knocking on somebody's door".

You Can't Lose-a Me Cholly

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

You Can't Lose—A Me Cholly is about a boy that's going places. And they gonna see things; and the little children all gonna follow. And here's what they sing.


D
A7
You can't lose a me, Chol-ly, You can't lose a me
D
A7
boy. You can't lose - a me, Chol-ly You can't lose a me
D
A7
Fine.
boy. Up to Wid-ow Win-ston's I went a-road-in',
D
A7
Down on my knees I was a - do- in'a lit - tle court- in'
D
A7
Ev- 'ry time she turned a- round she said it so fun - ny,
D. C.

I went a-rowing and my gal went too,
Down on the river when the boat broke through,
Every time she turned around she said it so funny:

Chorus

Hog and the sheep, they went to pasture,
Hog said to the sheep, "You better go a little faster."
Every time she turned around she said it so funny:

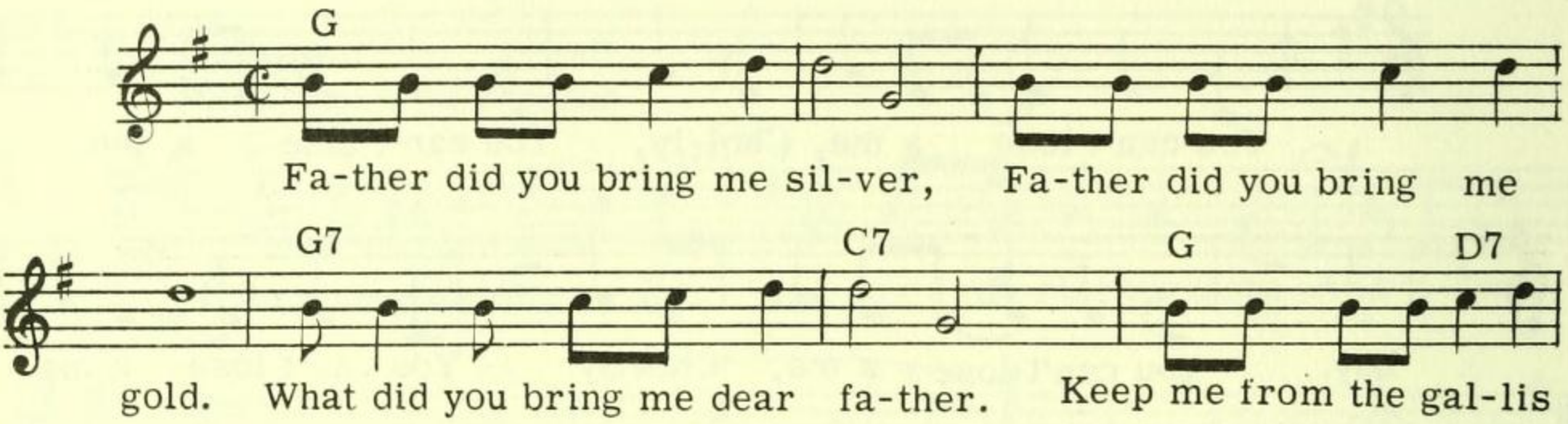
Chorus

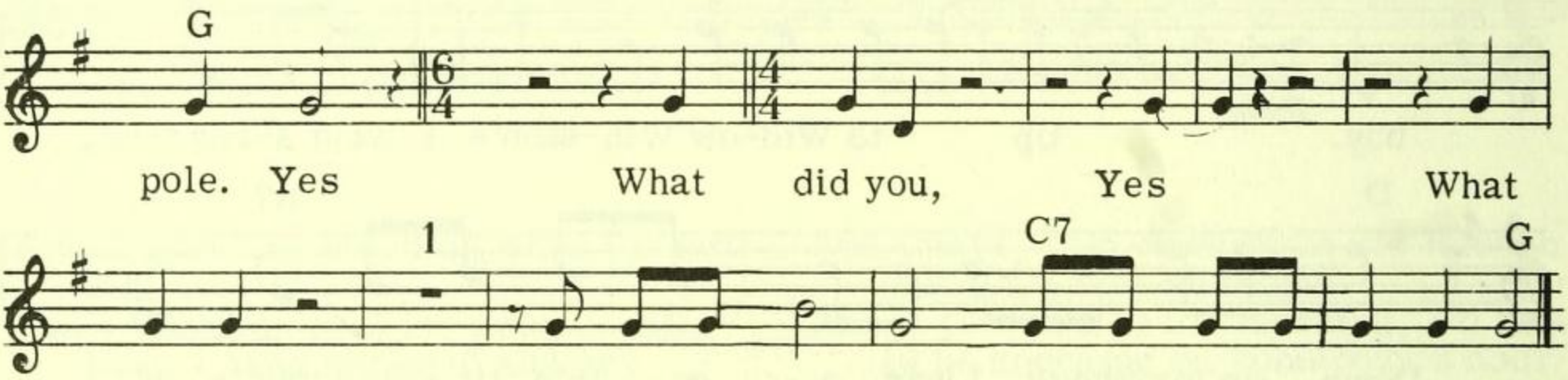
Me and my brother went down the road,
Trying to get some money to buy a gourd.
(spoken) You got to have a gourd to drink water out of.

Chorus

Gallis (Gallows) Pole

In olden times years ago when you put a man in prison behind the bars in a jailhouse if he had 15 or 25 or 30 dollars you could save him from the gallows pole because they were gonna hang him if he don't bring up a little money. Everybody come to see him in the jail. He was married too. Asked for who brang him something. His father came first, now here comes his mother.


G
Fa-ther did you bring me sil-ver, Fa-ther did you bring me
G7
C7
G
D7
gold. What did you bring me dear fa-ther. Keep me from the gal-lis



Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Edited with new additional material by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

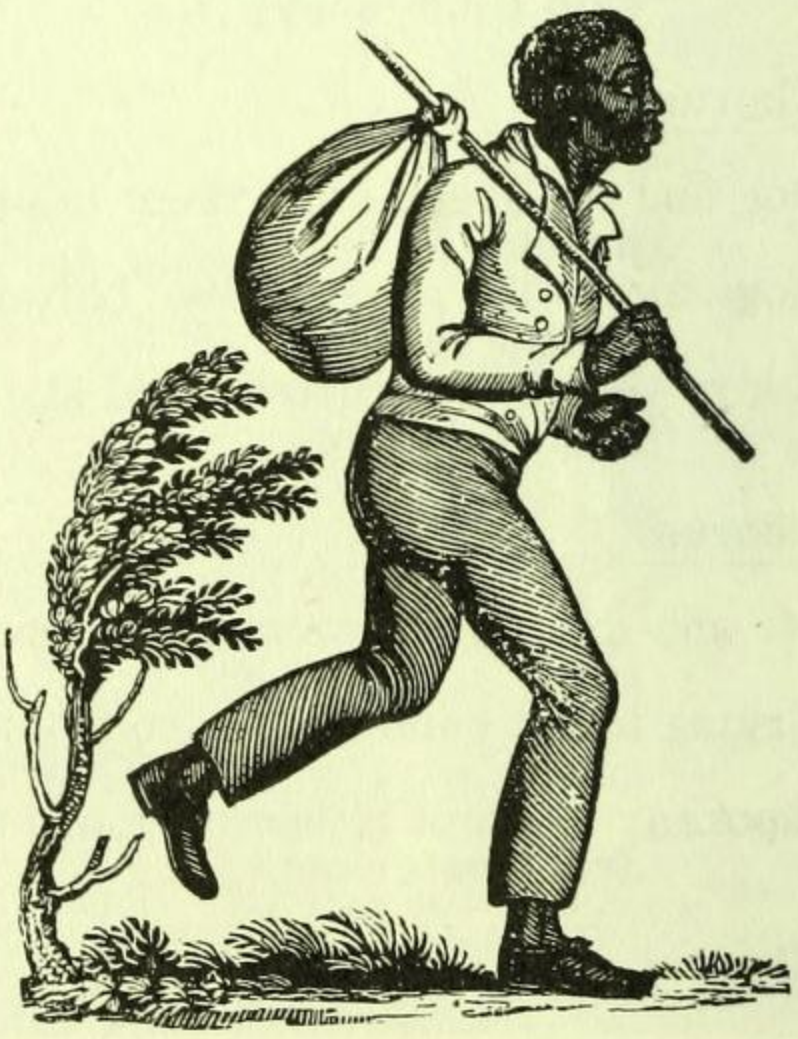
Mother did you bring me silver?
Mother did you bring me gold?
What did you bring me mother,
Keep me from the gallows pole?
What did you - what did you -
Keep me from the gallows pole?

Son, I brought some silver,
Son, I brought some gold.
Son I brought you everything
Keep you from the gallows pole.
Yes - I brought it. Yes - I brought it,
Keep you from the gallows pole.

Wife did you bring me silver...

Friends did you bring me silver...

(In Leadbelly's performance the "wife" and the "friends" don't answer. Perhaps you can make up a suitable reply for each.)



Skip To My Lou

New words and New Music arrangement by
Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

When you say "Skip To My Lou," little children got to skip to their partners. This means the little girls got to skip to the little boys and then they gonna dance around in a ring.

I'll get another one prettier than you
I'll get another one prettier than you
I'll get another one prettier than you
Skip to My Lou, my darling.

Hey, hey, Skip to My Lou. . .

Can't get a Bluebird a Jaybird'll do. . .

Little red wagon painted blue. . .

Fly in the sugar bowl, shoo fly,shoo. . .

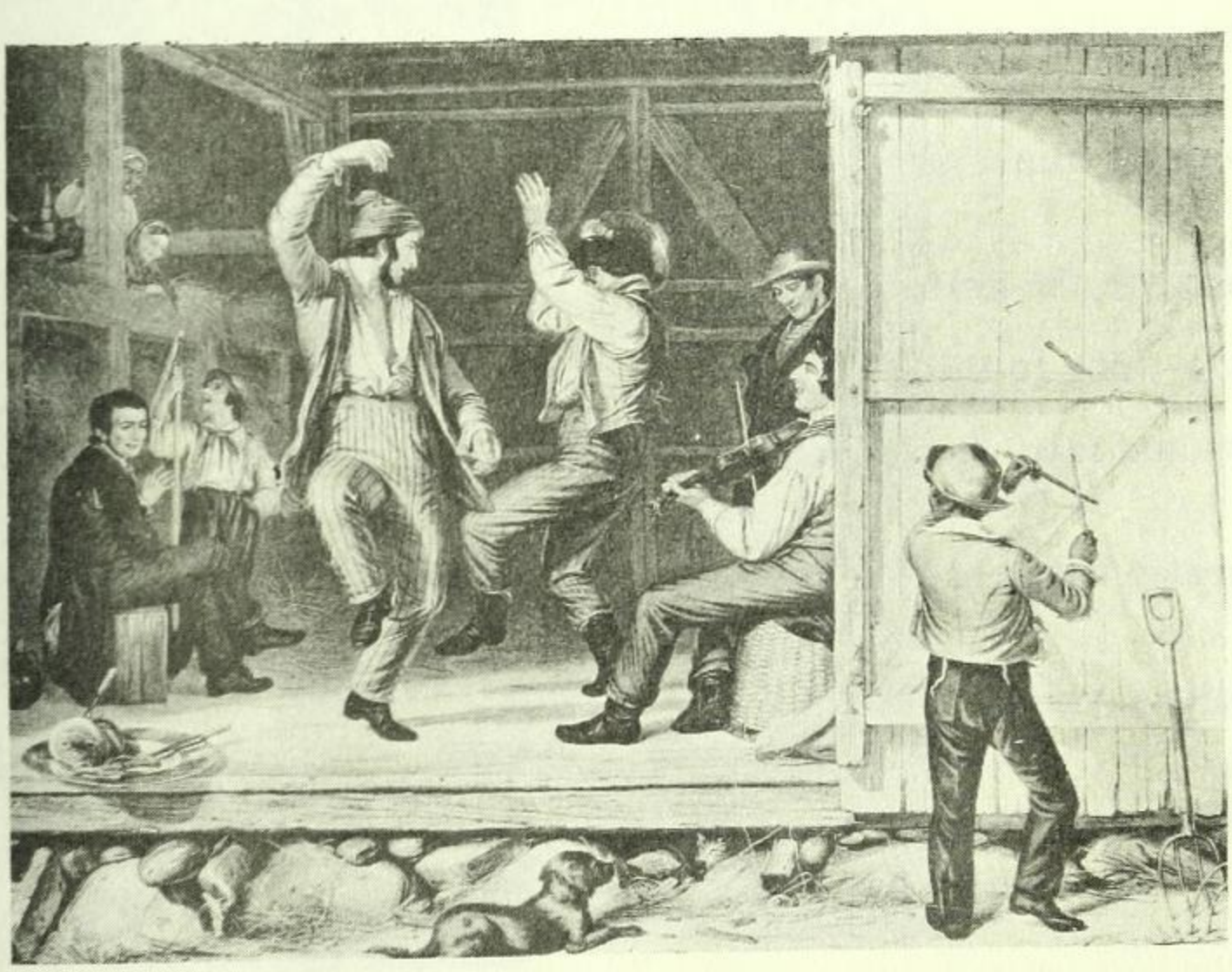
My old shoe is torn in two. . .

Cows in the cornfield two by two. . .

Stole my partner, what'll I do?. . .

I'll get another one quicker than you. . .

Hey, hey, Skip to My Lou. . .



Yellow Gal

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

"This is yellow gal -- it's a famous gal. An' the boys would always get to dancin' and sukey-jumpin' around, just singin' about Yellow Gal..."

He went home with the yellow gal,
He went home with the yellow gal,
He went home with the yellow gal,
He went home with the yellow gal.

He got thirty years with the yellow gal...

She's pretty and fine is the yellow gal...

She ain't none of mine, she's a yellow gal...

I went home with the yellow gal...

I didn't say a thing to the yellow gal...

She's pretty and fair, is the yellow gal...

She's got pretty hair, has the yellow gal...

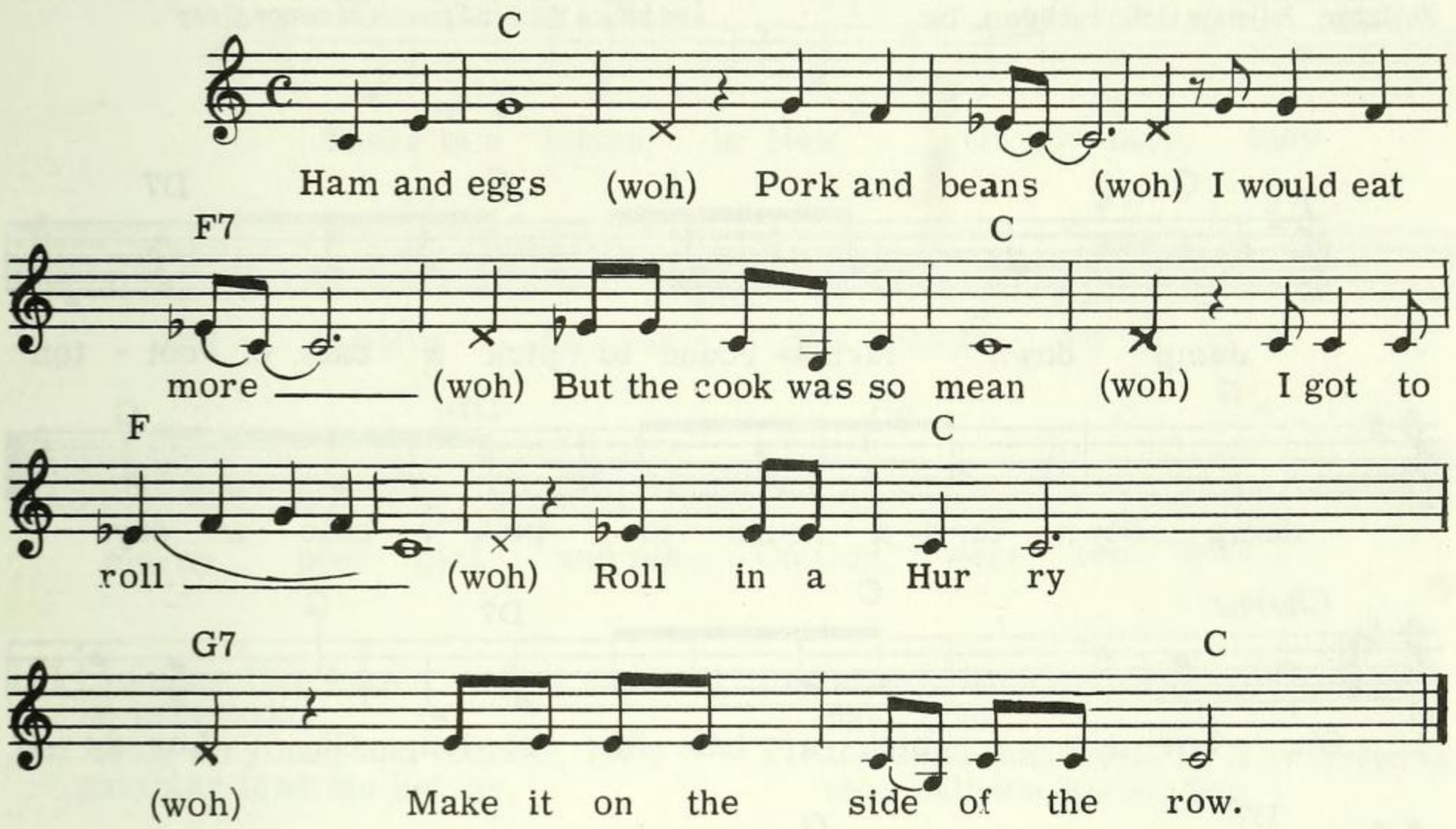
Yellow, yellow, yellow, it's a yellow gal...

(Chorus after each verse)

Ham and Eggs

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

This is the way the hammer falls when they sing about Ham and Eggs.

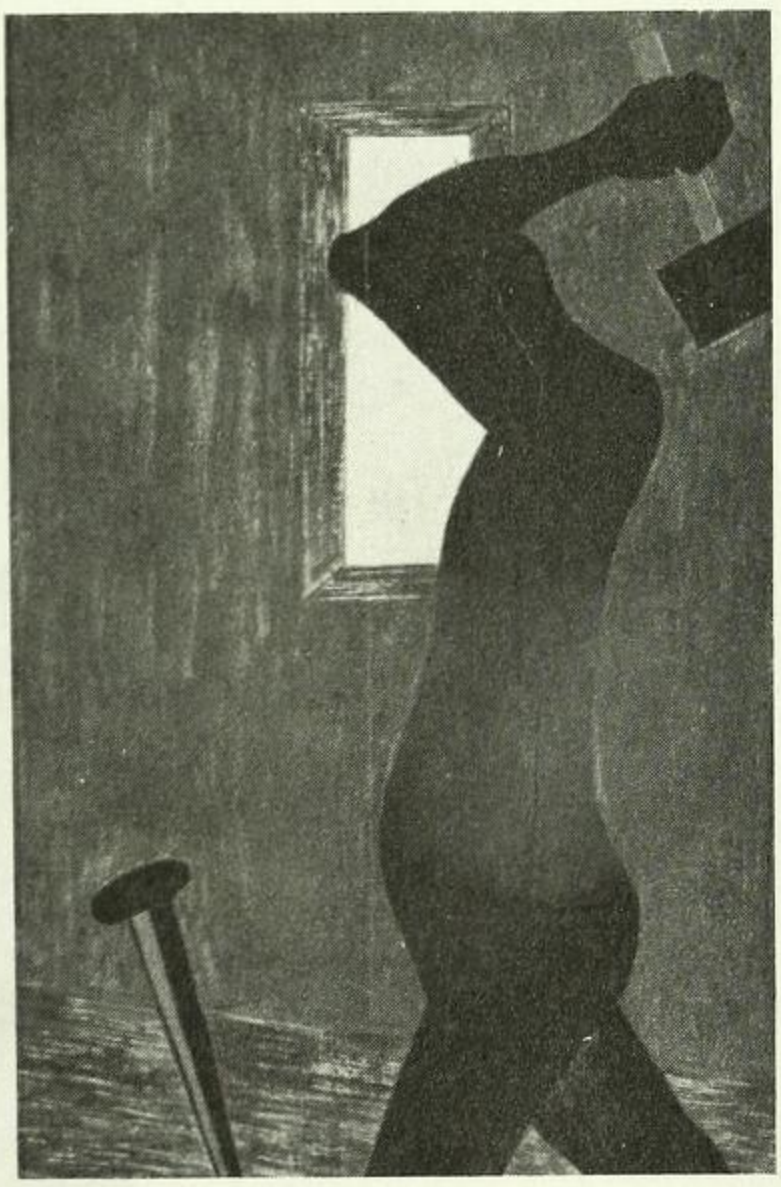

C
Ham and eggs (woh) Pork and beans (woh) I would eat
F7
C
more (woh) But the cook was so mean (woh) I got to
F
C
roll (woh) Roll in a Hur ry
G7
C
(woh) Make it on the side of the row.

If I'd a-known that the captain was bad,
Wouldn't have sold that special that I
once have had.

Chorus

If I had a-known that the captain was
blind,
I wouldn't have gone to work, boys, till
the clock struck nine.

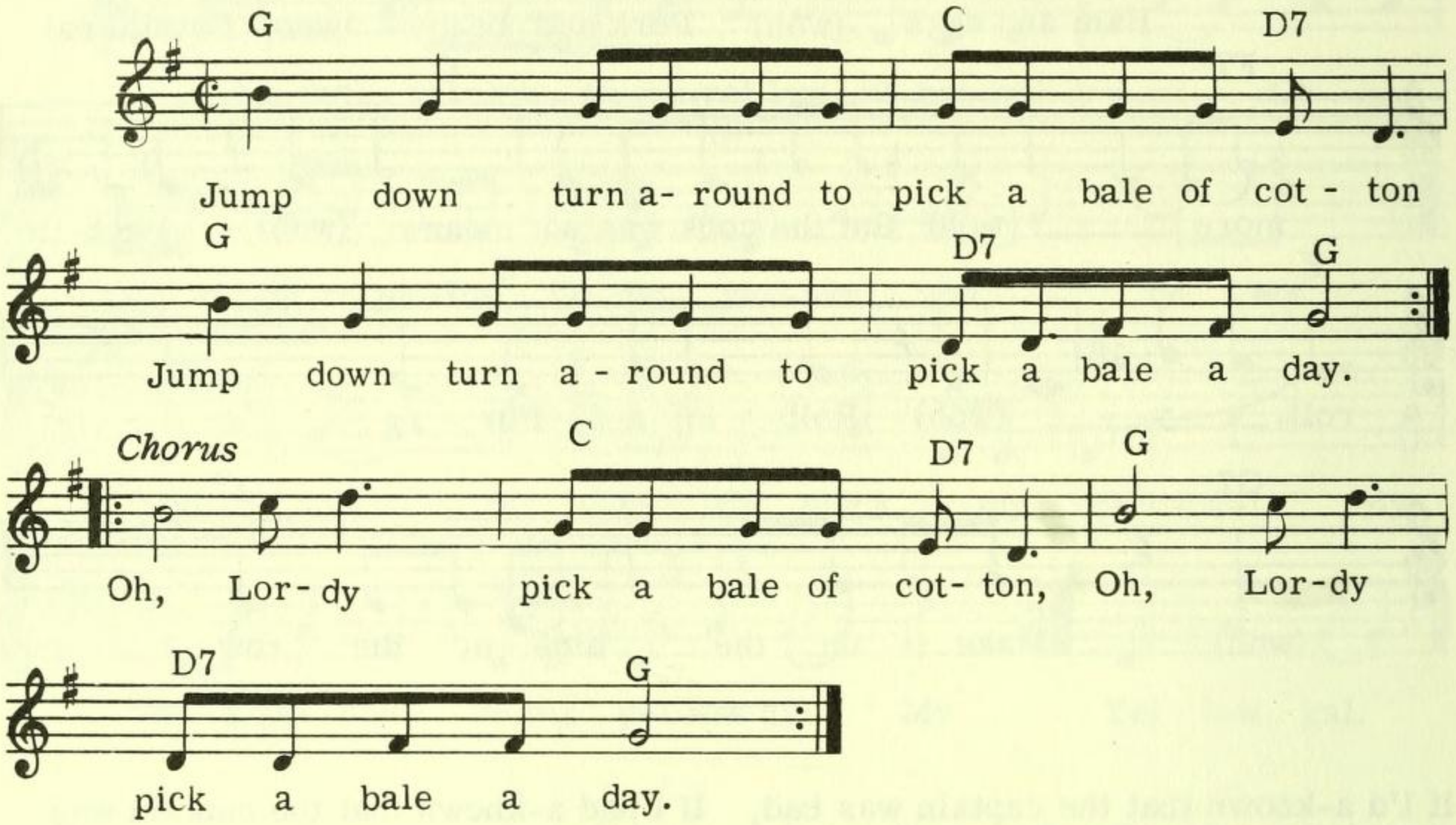
Chorus



Pick A Bale of Cotton

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

"Now this was when I was around Dallas, Texas, Pickin' cotton. I was picking a thousand pounds of cotton a day. And the way you get a thousand pounds of cotton a day, you've got to jump around to get it. You can't fool around and pick a thousand pounds of cotton a day".



Me and my gal can pick a bale of cotton
Me and my gal can pick a bale a day

Chorus

Me and my wife can pick a bale of cotton,
Me and my wife can pick a bale a day...

Chorus

Me and my friend can pick a bale of cotton,
Me and my friend can pick a bale a day...

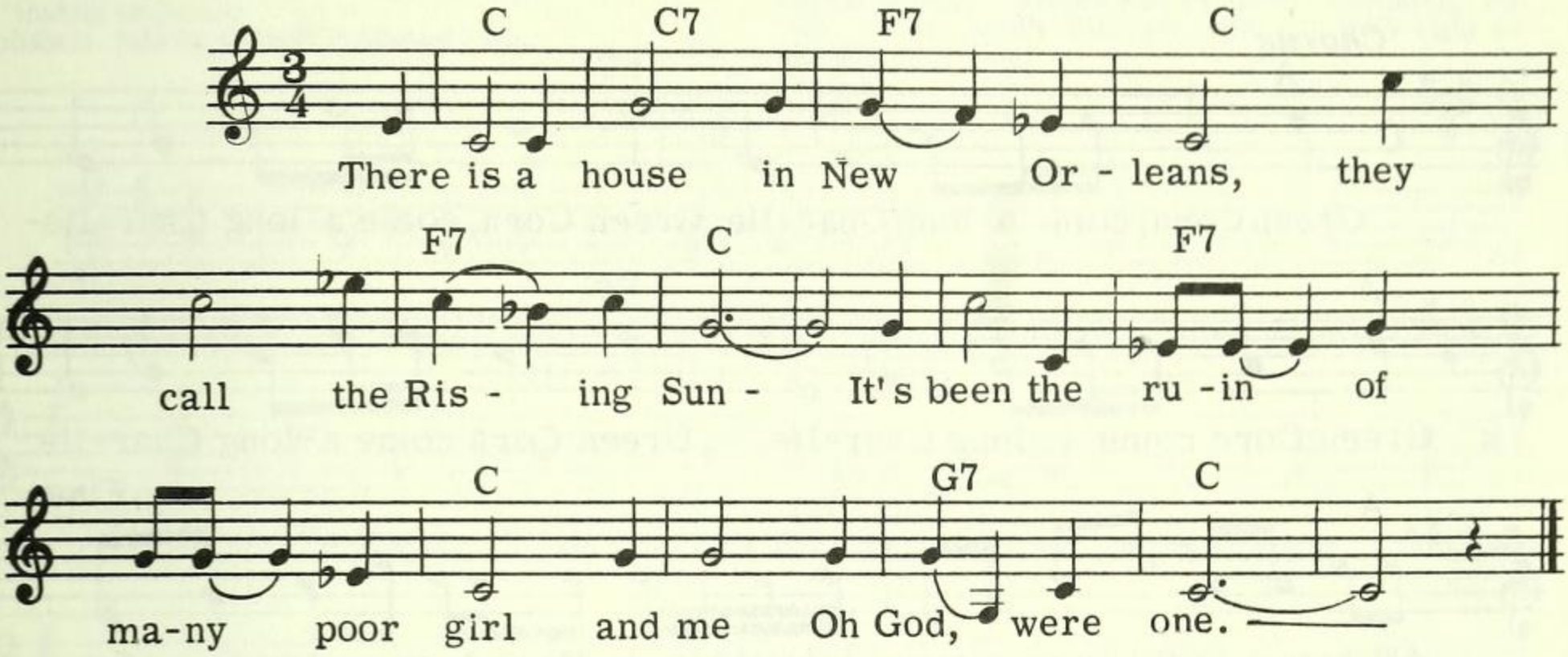
Chorus

Me and my poppa can pick a bale of cotton,
Me and my poppa can pick a bale a day...

Chorus

House of the Rising Sun

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.


C C7 F7 C
There is a house in New Or - leans, they
F7 C F7
call the Ris - ing Sun - It's been the ru - in of
C G7 C
ma-ny poor girl and me Oh God, were one.

If I had done like mama said, I wouldn't be here today,
But being so young and foolish, let a gambler lead me astray.

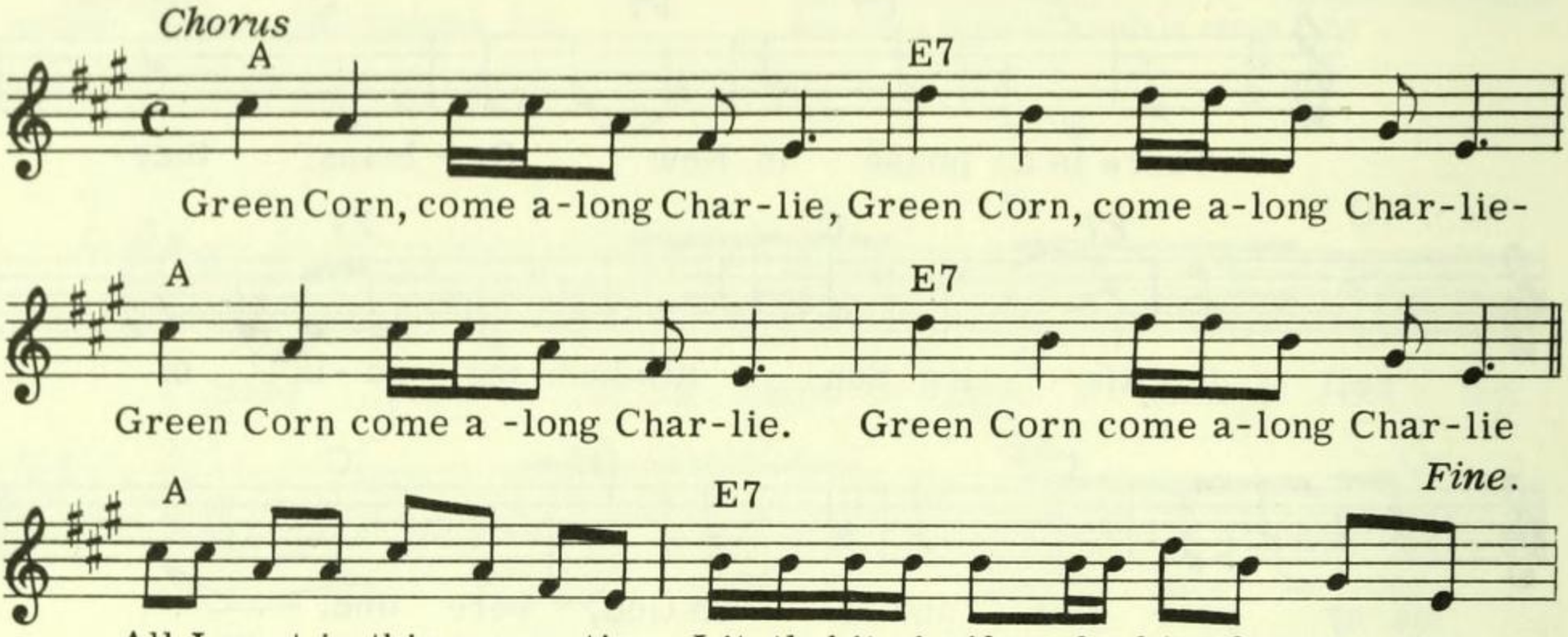
Go tell my baby sister, don't do like I have done,
Please shun that house in New Orleans they call the Rising Sun

I'm going back to New Orleans, my race is almost done
I'm going back to New Orleans, to live in that Rising Sun.

Green Corn

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

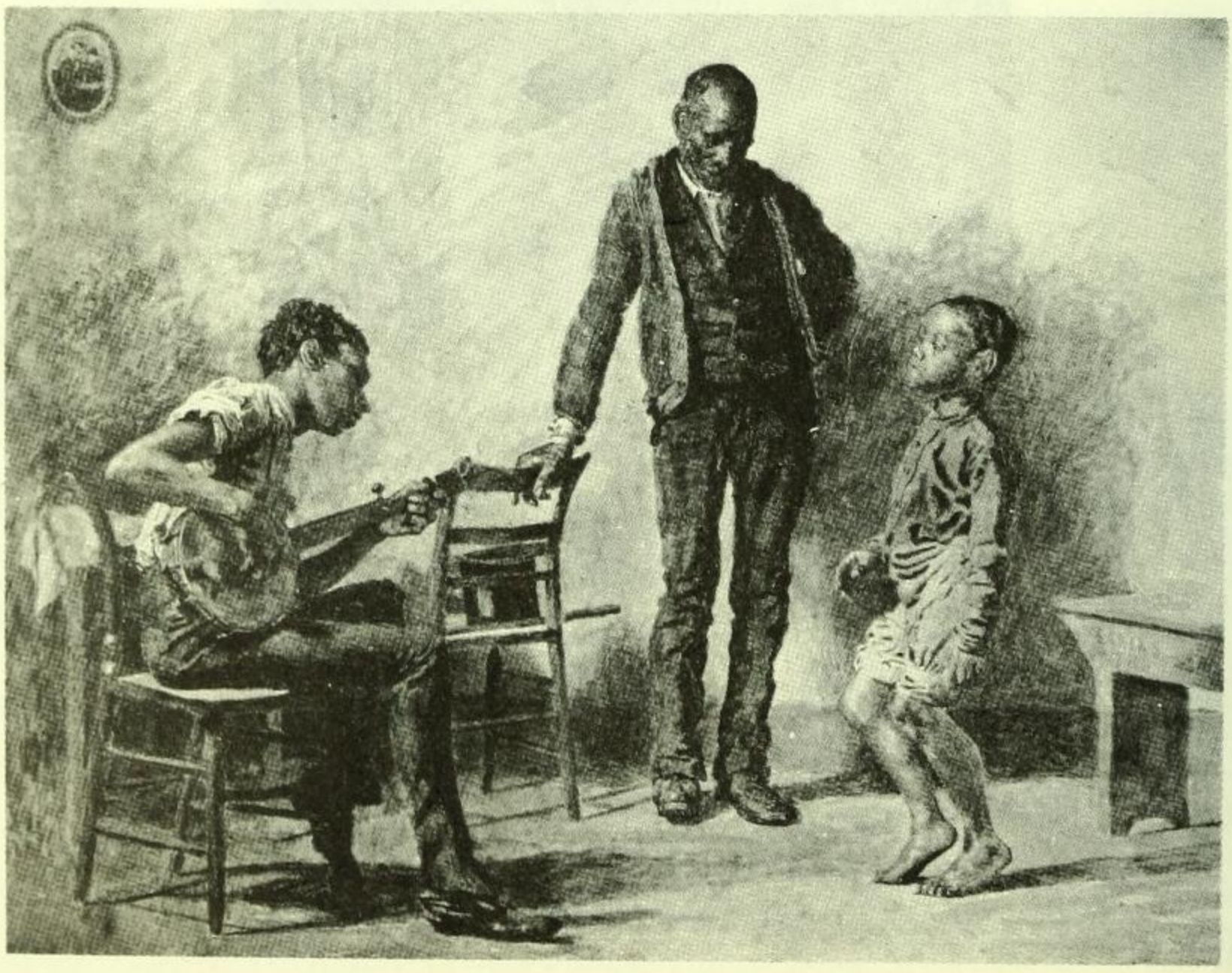
Chorus


A
E7
Green Corn, come a-long Char-lie, Green Corn, come a-long Char-lie-
A
E7
Green Corn come a -long Char-lie. Green Corn come a-long Char-lie
A
E7
Fine.
All I want in this cre-a-tion, Lit-tle bit o' wife and a big plan-ta - tion.

All I need to make me happy,
Two little kids to make me happy.

One named Sop and the other named
Gravy,
One gonna sop it up the other gonna
save it.

Wake, snake, day's a-breaking,
Peas in the pot and hoe cake's a-baking.



We Shall Walk Through the Valley

New words and New Music arrangement by
Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Now when you walk through the valley you're walking through the shadow, and that's darkness. And they have spooks around. Baboons and panthers. Elephants. But still, if the Lord's with you, you can walk right on through the valley.

G
D7
We shall walk thru the val - ley in the sha - dow of
G
D7
death. We shall walk thru the val - ley in peace —— And if
G
D7
Je-sus, Him- self shall be our Lead - er —— We shall
G
walk thru the val - ley in peace. ——

We will meet our father over there,
We will meet our father over there,
If Jesus himself shall be our leader,
We shall meet our father over there.

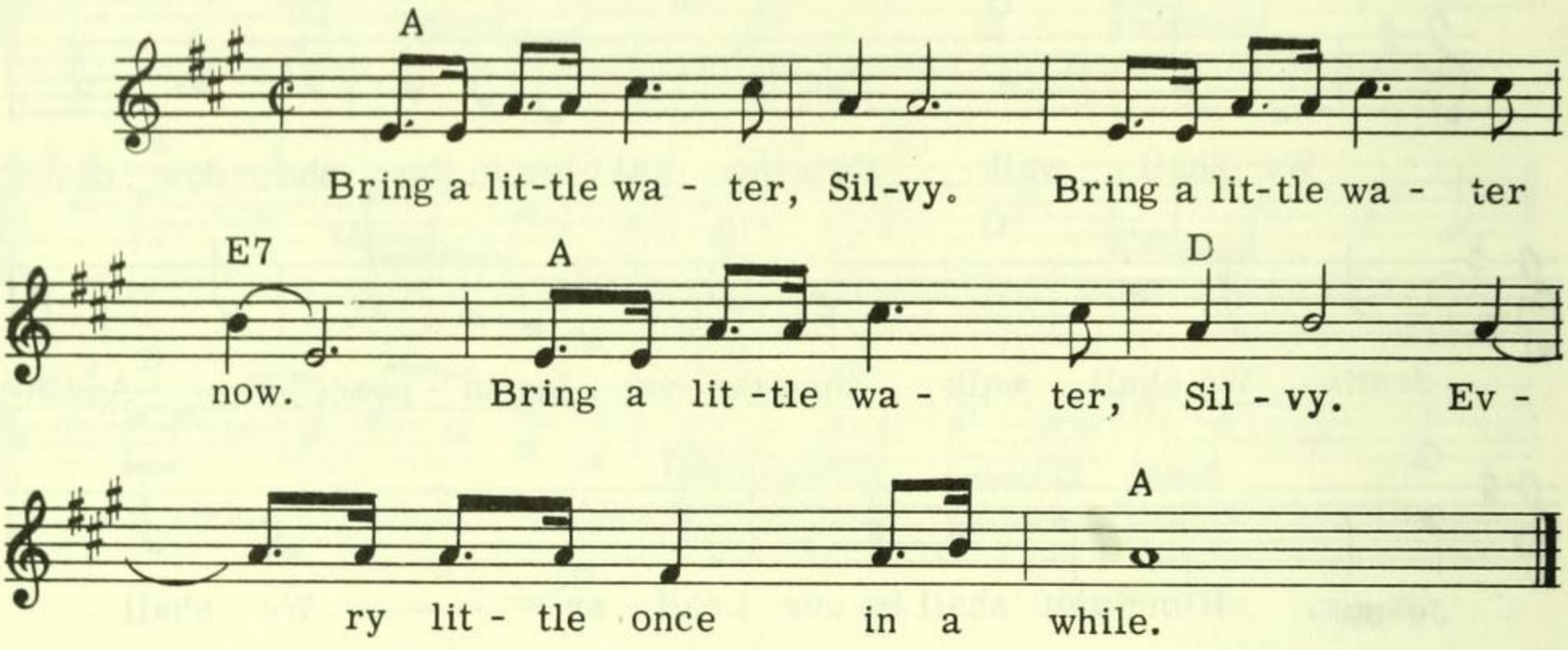
We shall walk through the valley in
the shadows of death,
We shall walk through the valley in
peace,
If Jesus himself shall be our leader,
We shall walk through the valley in
peace.

Harriet Tubman.

Bring Me A Little Water, Silvy

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

July and August is hot and this man's wife - he call her Sylvy - and the only way he gets his cool water, he got to call Sylvy to get his water down there 'cause he's burnin' down.



Don't you see me comin',
Don't you see me now,
Don't you see me comin',
Every li'l once in a while?

Chorus

Bring me the bucket, Silvy
Bring me the bucket, now,
Bring me the bucket, Silvy,
Every li'l once in a while.

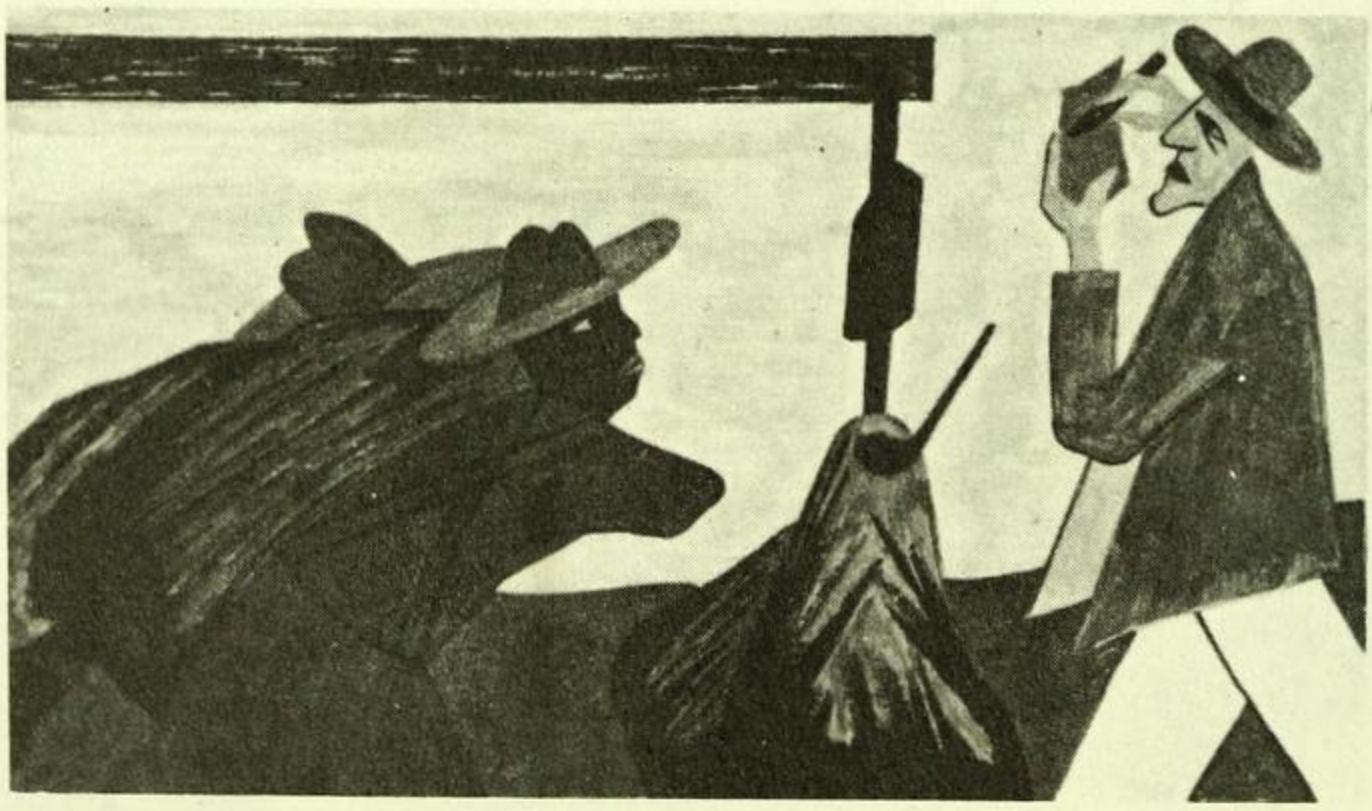
Chorus

See me come a-runnin'
See me comin' now,
See me come a-runnin'
Every little once in a while

Chorus

Silvy come a-runnin'
Silvy comin' now,
Silvy come a-runnin'
Every little once in a while

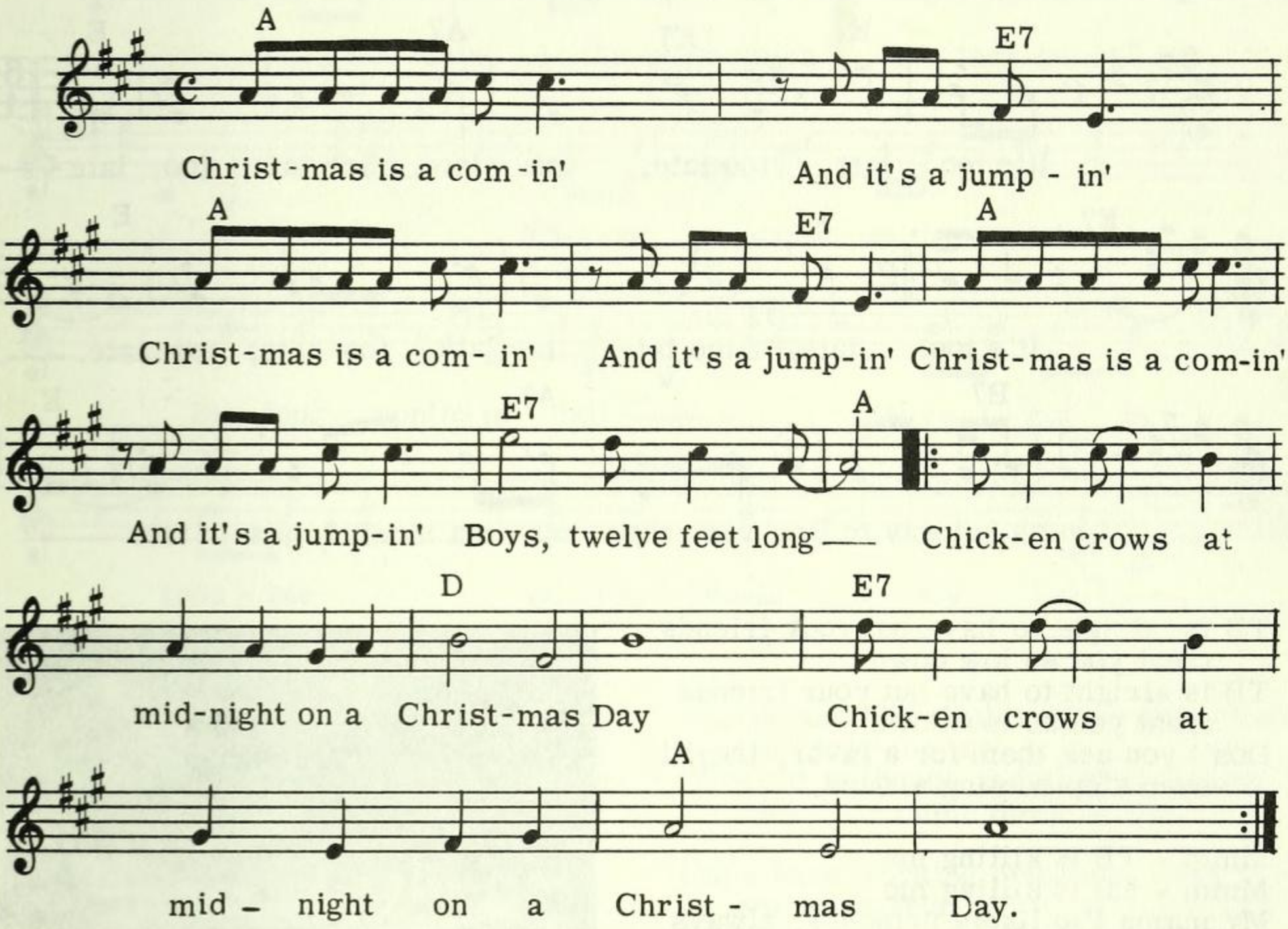
Chorus



Christmas Is A-Coming

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

All the time when it's Christmas where I come from, don't forget it and don't fool yourself. Chickens going to crow at midnight on Christmas night. I don't know how they know it, but they know. And old folks try to get their little children to go to bed 'cause Santa Claus is coming. But the children are all going to try to see Santa Claus. They going to try to stay up. They going to get together and go out in the yard and play. They going to stay up till 12 o'clock. And here's what they going to sing.



Children get so happy on a Christmas
Day,
Children get so happy on a Christmas
Day.

Santa Claus a-comin' and he's a-comin',
Santa Claus a-comin' and he's a-comin',
Santa Claus a-comin' and he's a-comin',
Boys, 12 feet long.

Santa Claus is comin' on Christmas, on
a Christmas Day,
Santa Claus is comin' on Christmas, on
a Christmas Day.

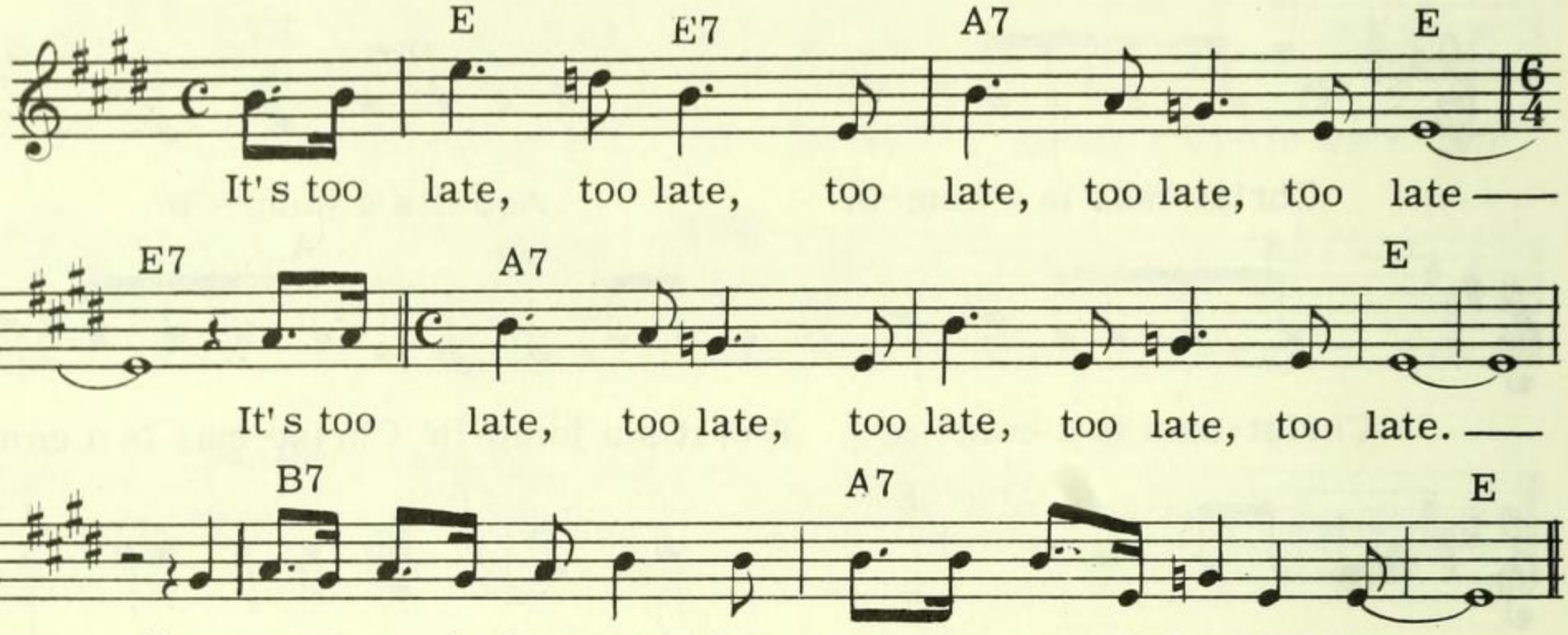
Children run and shout to pappy on a
Christmas Day,
Children run and shout to pappy on a
Christmas Day.

Little children get so happy on a
Christmas Day,
Little children get so happy on a
Christmas Day.

T. B. Blues

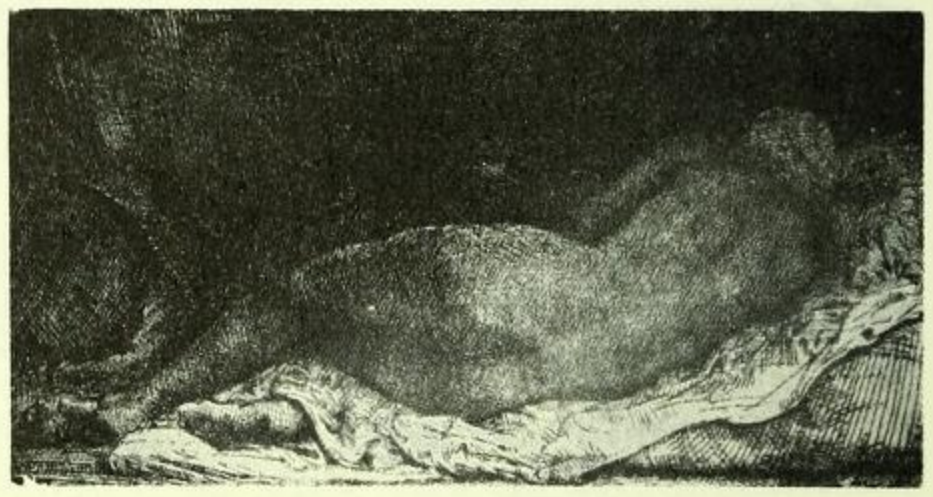
Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Now this is the T. B. Blues. The first woman who had the T. B. she died. The woman didn't have but one child in the world and that was a girl and every time she would come to her bed she would look up at her mother and the men she was goin' with - maybe 25 or 30. But anyhow, one man in the bunch was a sweetback man and all the rest of the men wearing overhauls. She asked him did you want anything, she wouldn't have it. She asked the sweetback man for one dime and he didn't have no dime and she worried about it all the time he was gone.



TB is alright to have but your friends
treat you so low down
TB is alright to have but your friends
treat you so low down
Don't you ask them for a favor, they'll
even stop coming around.

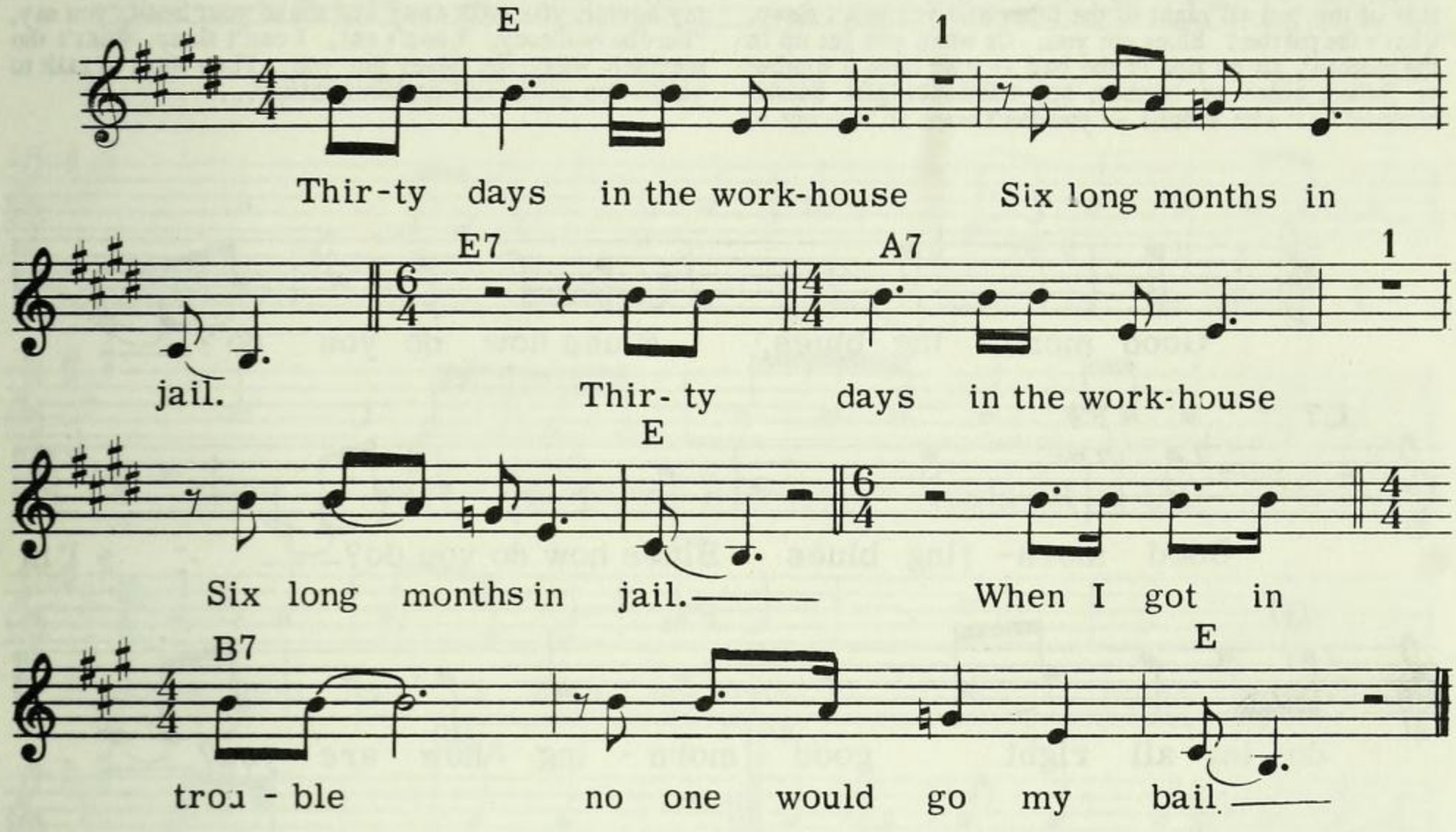
Mmm - TB is killing me
Mmm - TB is killing me
My mama I'm like a prisoner, always
wishin' I'm free



Jailhouse Blues

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

I been down so long, Lord,
But I'm getting up again.

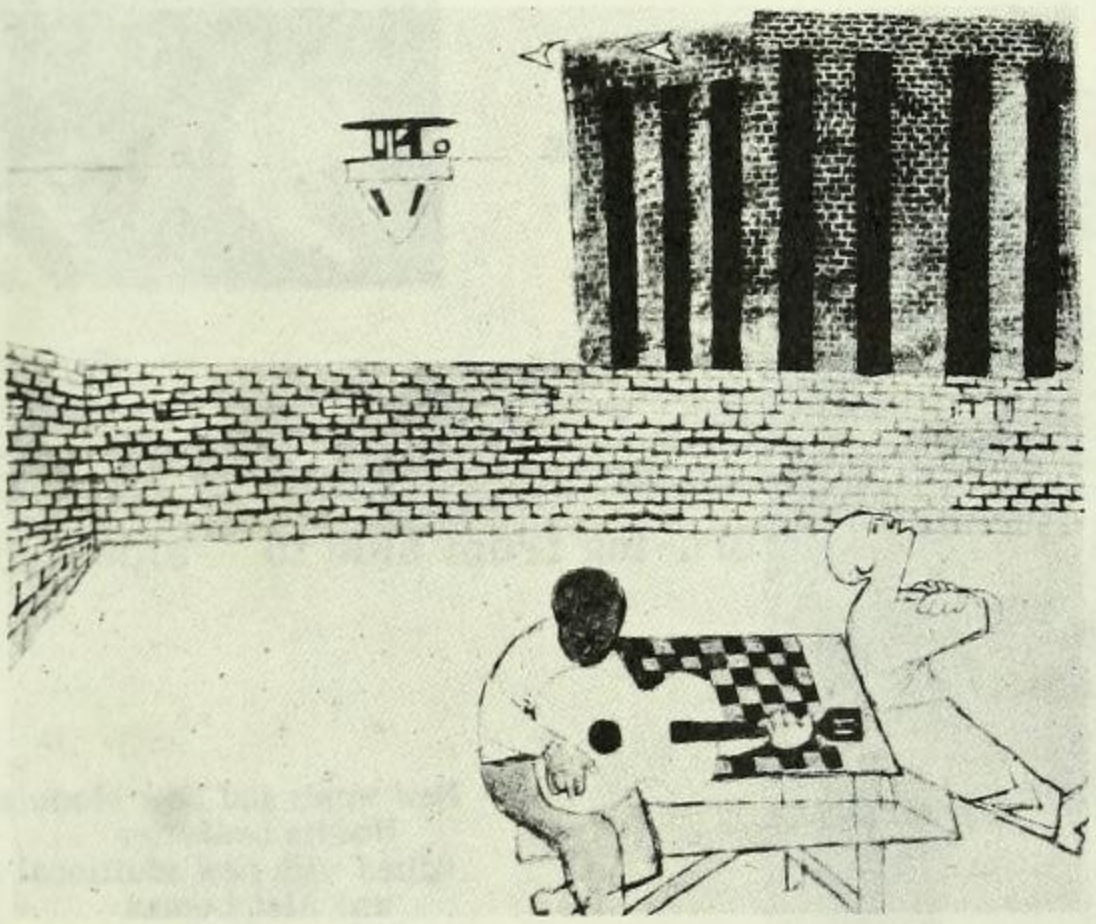


When a man gets in trouble everybody turns him down
When a man gets in trouble everybody turns him down
I done got me in jail, baby, - Hart's Island bound.

If I'd a-done like my baby told me I would not be here today, 2x
I would not have been on Riker's Island with six long months to stay

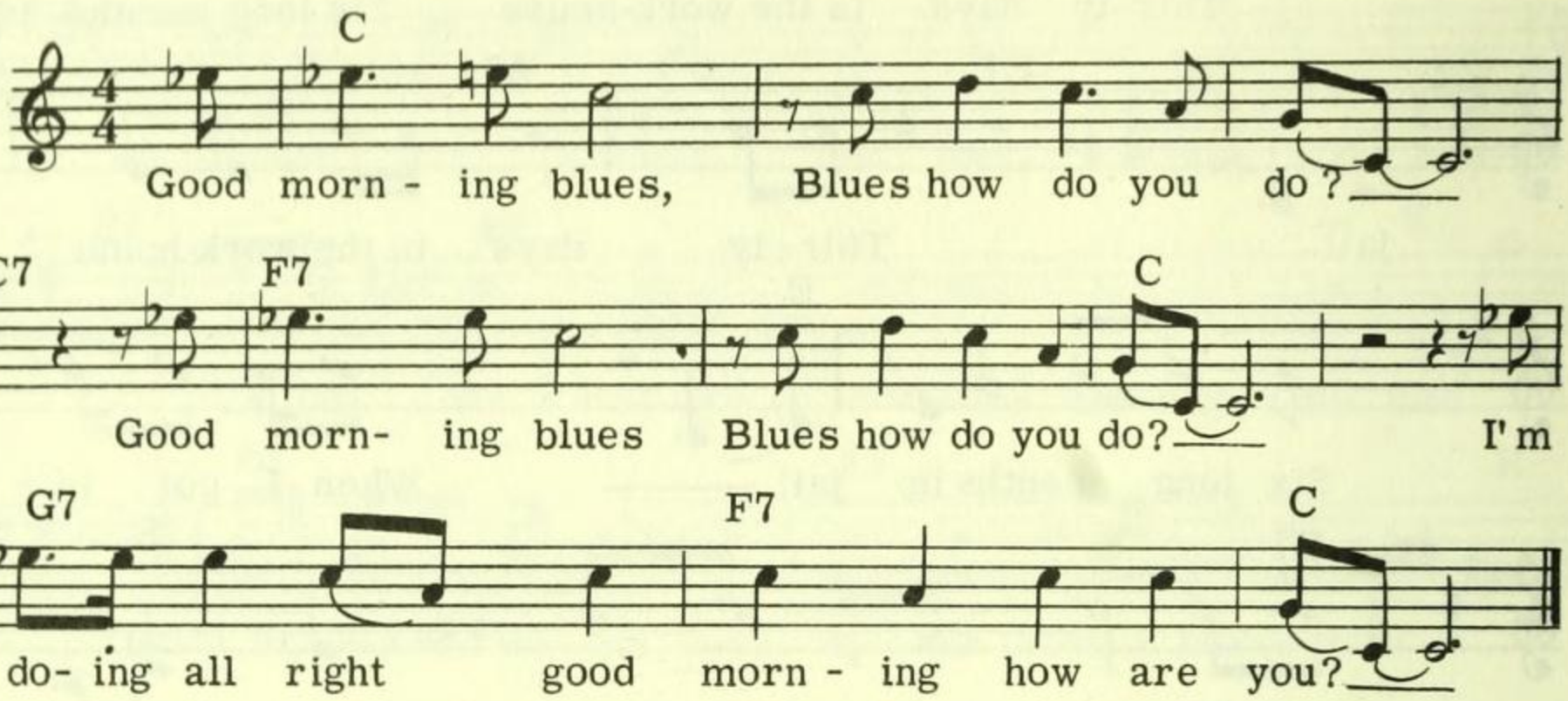
Oh, please Mr. Jailer come and unlock that door for me 2x
This old jailhouse is full of blues and they done come down on me.

I'm a hard working prisoner, sent here without a trial 2x
Now my heart is aching to see this great long while.



Good Morning Blues

Now I'll tell you about the blues. All Negroes like blues. Why? Because they was born with the blues. And now, everybody have the blues. Sometimes they don't know what it is. But when you lay down at night, turn from one side of the bed all night to the other and you can't sleep, what's the matter? Blues got you. Or when you get up in the mornin', sit on side of the bed -- may have a mother or father, sister or brother, boy-friend or girl friend, husband or a wife around -- you don't want no talk out of um. They ain't done you nothin', you ain't done them nothin' -- what's the matter? Blues got you. Well, you get up and shev your feet down under the table and look down in your place -- may have chicken and rice, take my advice, you walk away and shake your head, you say, "Lord have mercy. I can't eat. I can't sleep, what's the matter? Why, the blues got you. They want to talk to you. You got to tell um something....



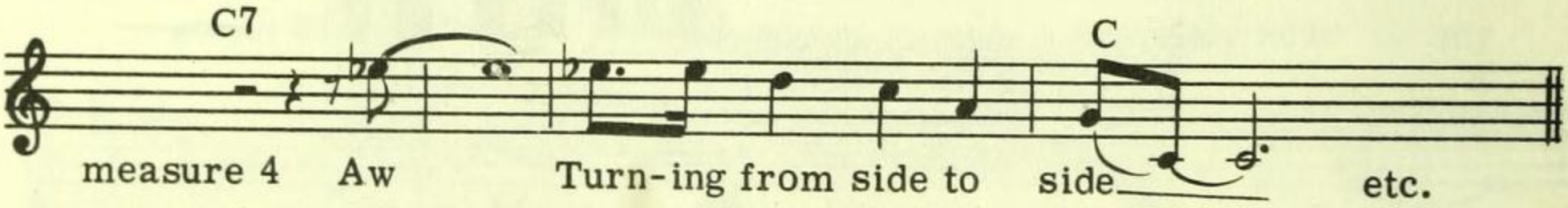
I laid down last night, turnin' from
side to side,
Aw*, turnin' from side to side,
I was not sick, but I was just
dissatisfied.

When I got up this mornin', blues
walkin' 'round my bed,
Aw, blues walkin' 'round my bed,
I went to eat my breakfast, the blues
was all in my bread.

I got a new way of spelling, Memphis,
Tennessee,
Aw, Memphis, Tennessee,
Double E, double T, Lord, double
N, X-Y-Z.

I sent for you yesterday, here you
come a-walking today,
Sent for you yesterday, here you come
a-racking today,
You got your mouth wide open - you
don't know what to say.

*Sometimes Leadbelly left a few words out of the second line of some verses, this is the way he sang it...



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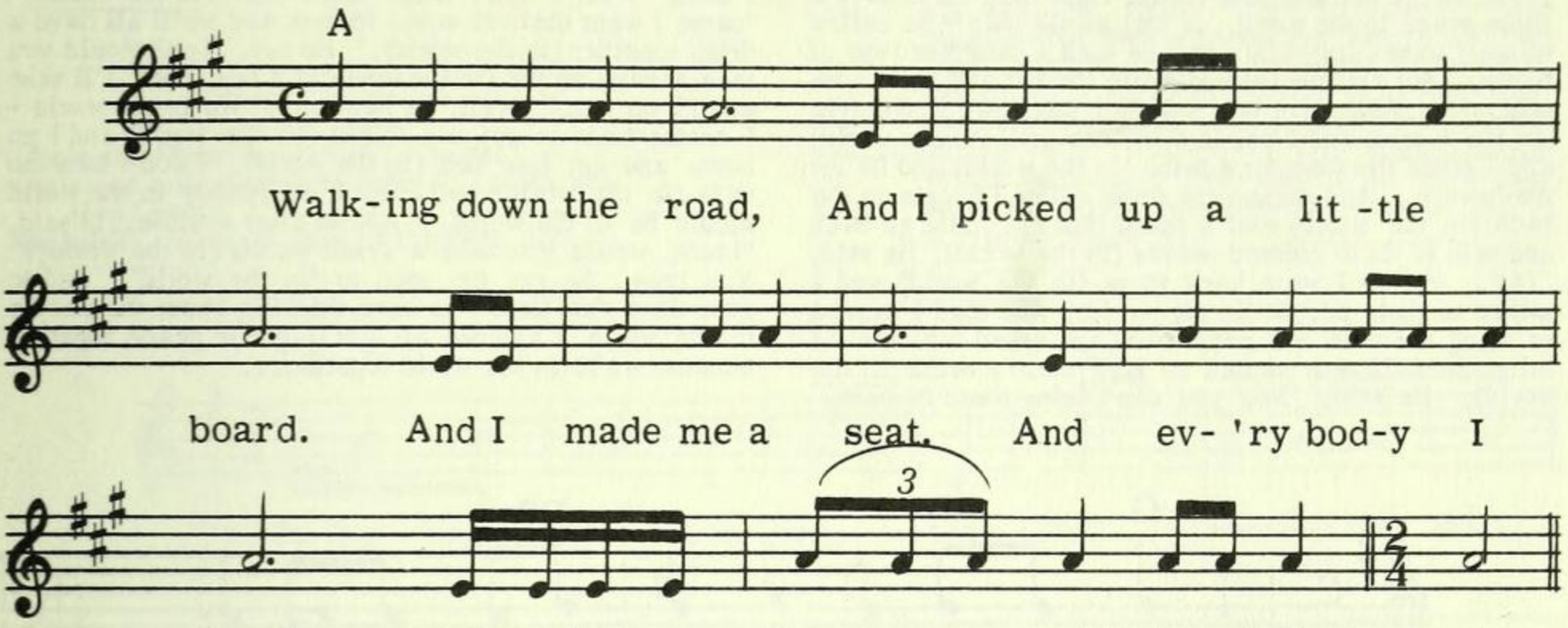
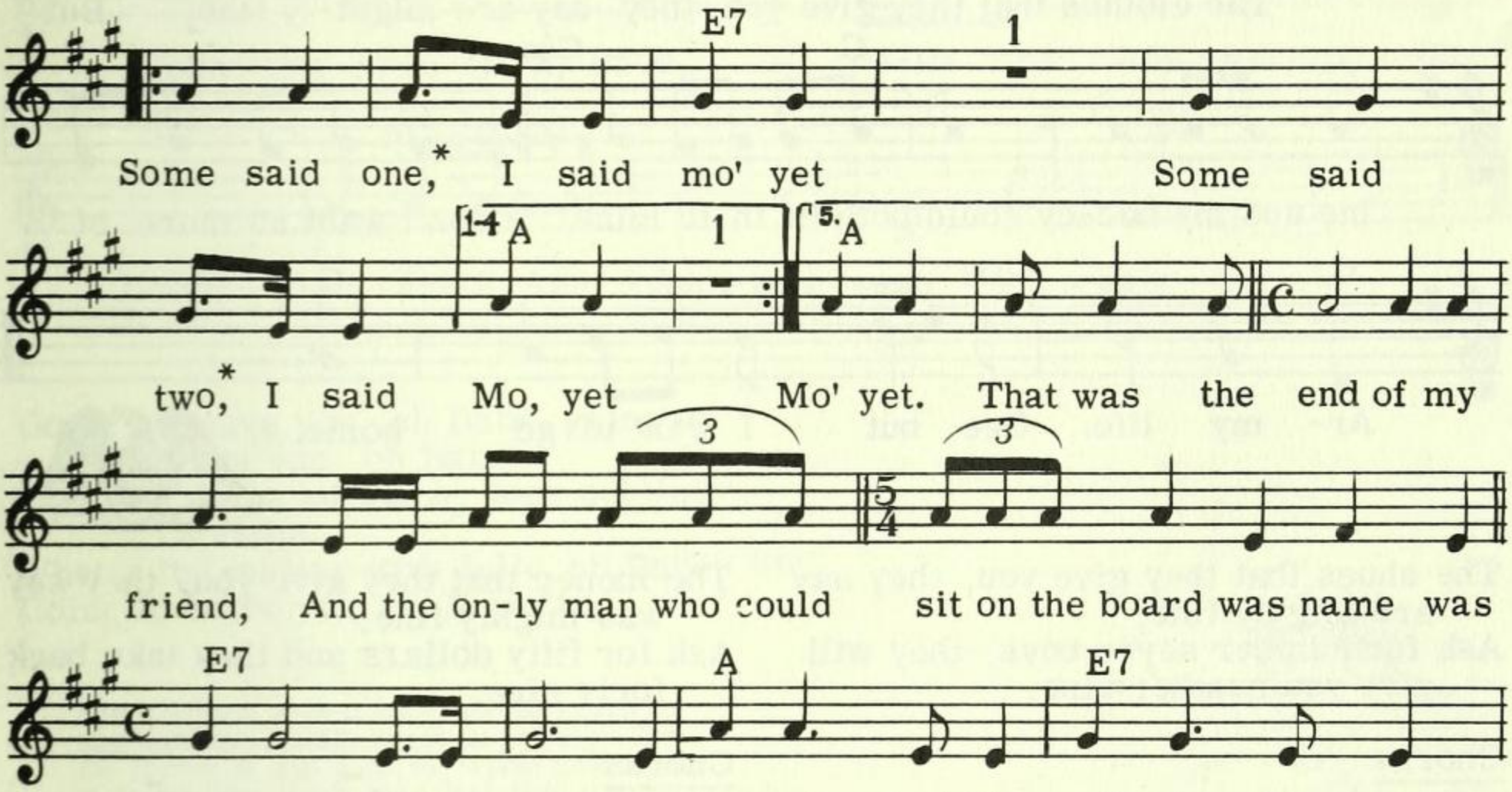
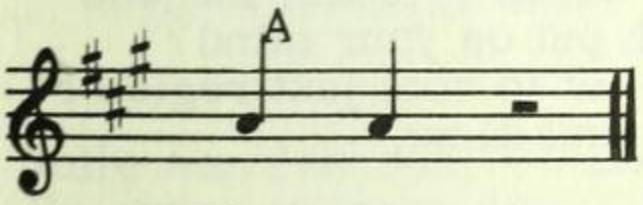
More Yet

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.


A
Walk-ing down the road, And I picked up a lit-tle
board. And I made me a seat. And ev-'ry bod-y I
3
meet want-ed to know, How man-y could sit on that seat.





Mo' yet.

*In subsequent verses sing three, four, five etc. through ten.

Army Life

New words and New Music arrangement by
Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

...If we go out and vote for the right man we'll have a little peace in the world...I met an old man - he called himself something different - he used a different type of name...But anyhow we walked in the Bar and Grill. He said, "My friend (in the world) I was down in Georgia (in the world) and I was in a bar and grill (in the world) and I asked the man for a drink (in the world) and he let me have it. And there were some colored people in the back (in the world) and I asked him if I could go back and talk to them colored people (in the world). He said, 'Yes'. And so I went back there (in the world) and I talked to them people (in the world). And then I wanted to bring them in - I come back and asked him could I bring them in - I wanted to give them a drink (in the world). He said, 'No, you can't bring them in here, I said, 'Well I don't think that's right (in the world) - 'cause I want them to come in here and we'll all have a drink together (in the world).' He say, 'Look would you take a drink on me (in the world)?' I say, 'Yes, I'll take a drink on you." Well, he kept on - "We in the world - I comes here to get my drinks (in the world) and I go home and get into bed (in the world). I don't have no wife (in the world) but I think everybody in the world should be in the world." And so after a while...I said, "Look, would you take a drink on me (in the world)?" You know, he got me used to 'in the world'. And so ever since that time I've been thinking about the people in the world - and we all got to get in peace together because we're in the world together...

G
D7
The clothes that they give you they say are might- y fine, But
G
Cho
C
me and my bud-dy could both fit in-to mine I don't want no more of
G
D7
G
Ar- my life. Gee but I want to go home.

The shoes that they give you, they say
are mighty fine;
Ask for number seven boys, they will
give you number nine.

Chorus

The hot dogs that they give you, they
say are mighty fine;
One rolled off the table and it started
marking time.

Chorus

The coffee that they give you, they say
it was mighty fine;
It tastes like something else and it's
just like iodine.

Chorus

The biscuits that they give you, they
say are mighty fine;
One jumped off the table and knocked
out a pal of mine.

Chorus

The money that they give you, they say
was mighty fine;
Ask for fifty dollars and they take back
forty nine.

Chorus

When you go out to vote tell me who
you gonna put on your mind?
When you go out to vote just register
and take your time.

Chorus

We don't want no more war, boy, and
I got it on my mind;
And when you go out and register you
better take your time.

Chorus

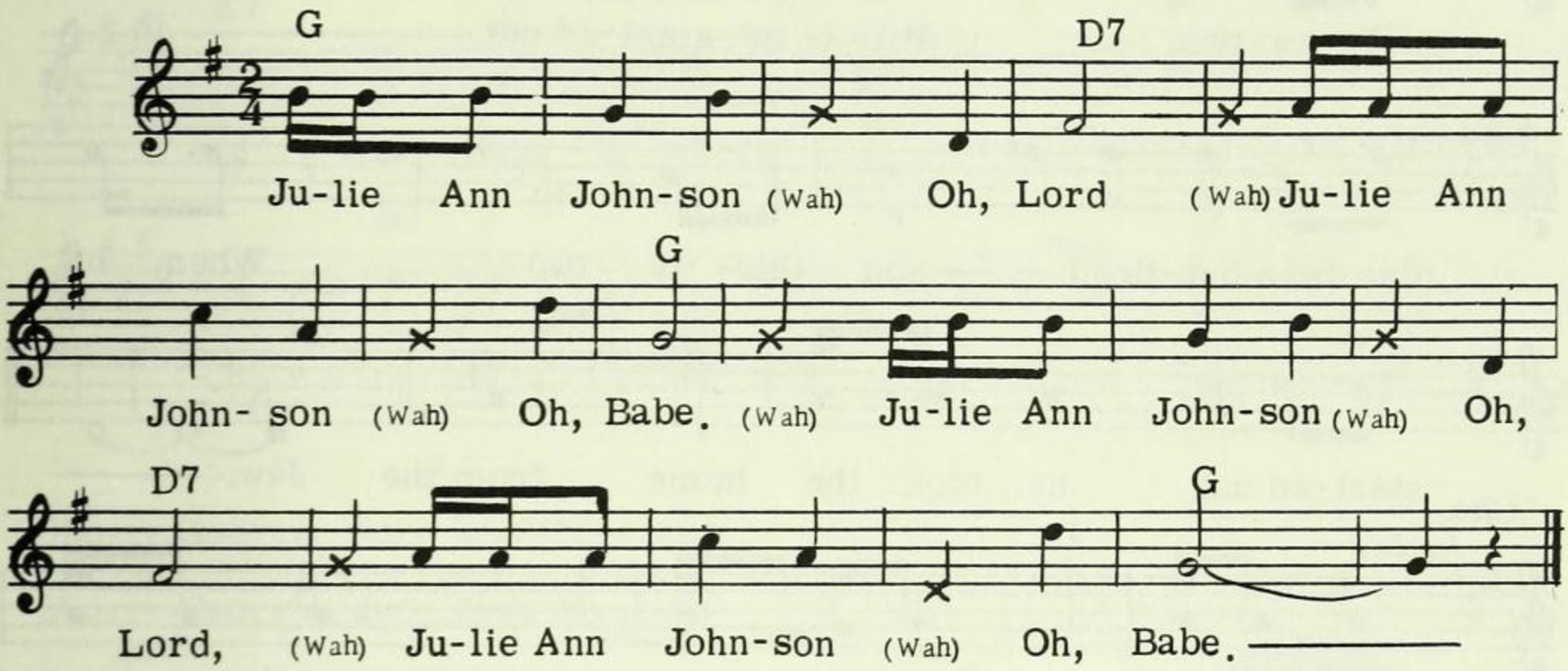
They food is getting higher - getting
higher every day,
But, boy, the money I'm getting it
ain't enough to pay.

Chorus

Julie Ann Johnson

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and
Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Now this is Julie Ann Johnson. 20 men on one log and they cuttin' 4-foot wood apart--they usin' double handled axes and the man in the lead, he's going to sing Julie Ann Johnson and the boys are going to answer. But every time the ax come down, all 20 of them axes fallin' at one time. Not one ax falls and you hold your'n back--drop them axes in the log at one time--we'll talk about Julie Ann Johnson, which is a good-lookin' girl:

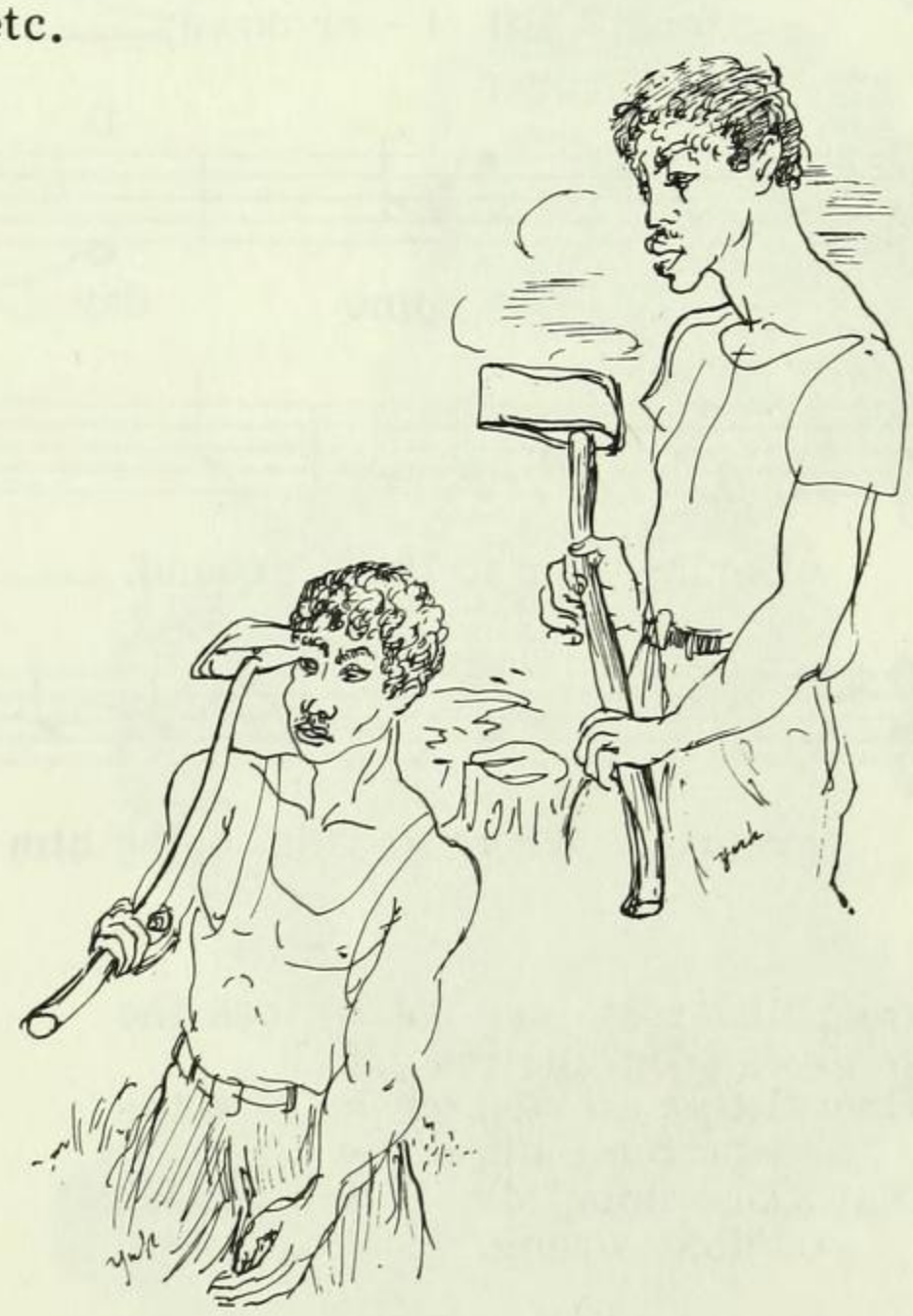

G
D7
Ju-lie Ann John-son (Wah) Oh, Lord (Wah) Ju-lie Ann
G
John- son (Wah) Oh, Babe. (Wah) Ju-lie Ann John-son (Wah) Oh,
D7
G
Lord, (Wah) Ju-lie Ann John-son (Wah) Oh, Babe.

Going to leave you, oh Babe, going to
leave you, oh Babe.
Look out Julie, oh Babe, look out Julie,
Oh Babe.
What's the matter with Julie, oh Babe, etc.
Going to leave you, oh Babe, etc.

Now all them axes is fallin' the boys going to sing Julie Ann Johnson just to let you know that the rhythm is still goin' on--s'pose those axes is fallin' you won't hear 'em right now but they'll come back directly--the boys are still singin' about Julie Ann Johnson:

Julie Ann Johnson, Oh Lord ...
I'm going to leave you, Oh Lord ...
I'm going to get married, Oh Lord ...
Gonna marry Martha, Oh Lord ...
Give 'em Molly Brama, Oh Lord ...

Julie Ann Johnson, Oh Lord ...
Drop them axes, Oh Lord ...
Drop 'em together, oh Babe...
Julie Ann Johnson, oh Babe...
Going to leave you, oh Babe...



Hitler Song

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

When Hitler started out he took the
Jews from their home
When Hitler started out he took the
Jews from their home
That's one thing Mr. Hitler you know
you done wrong.

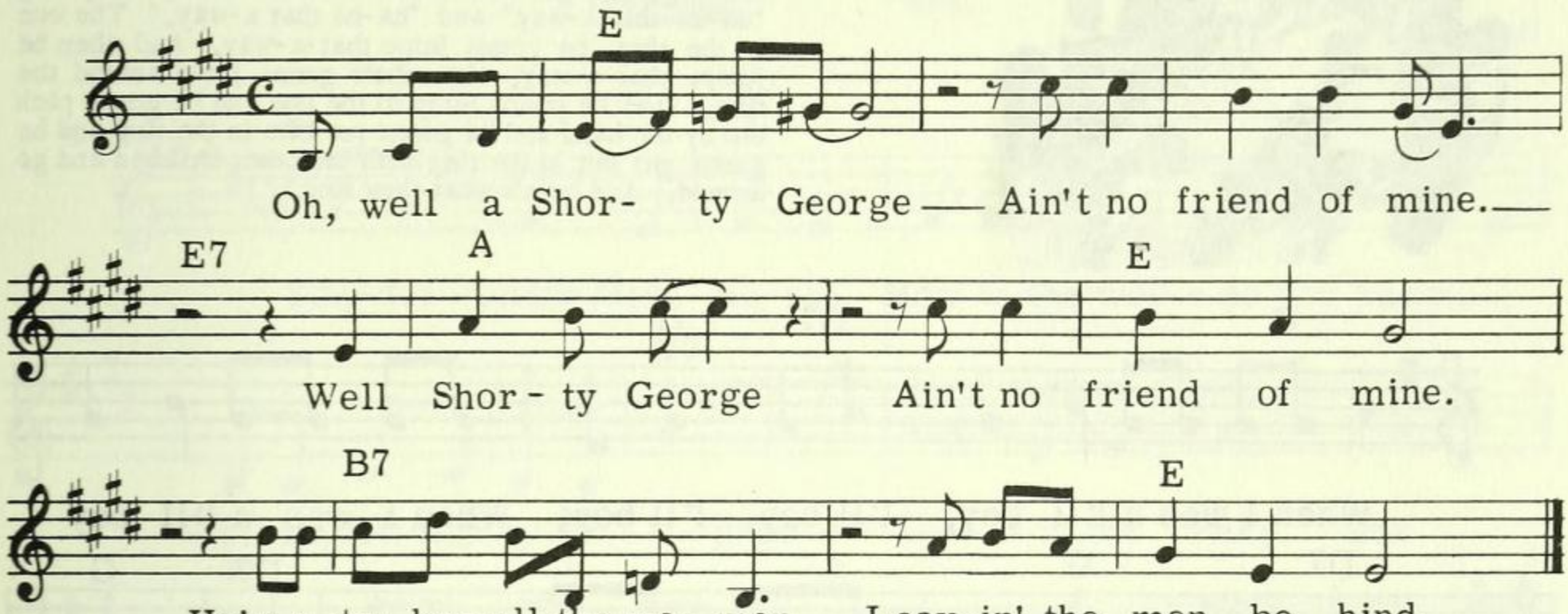
Chorus

You ain't no iron and you ain't no solid
rock,
You ain't no iron and you ain't no solid
rock,
But we American people say, "Mister
Hitler, you is got to stop! "

Chorus

Shorty George

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.


E
Oh, well a Shor- ty George — Ain't no friend of mine.—
E7
A
E
Well Shor - ty George Ain't no friend of mine.
B7
E
He's a ta- ken all the wo- men Leav-in' the men be hind.

Shorty George, done been here and
gone
Shorty George, done been here and
gone
Lord, he left a many po' man
A long way from home

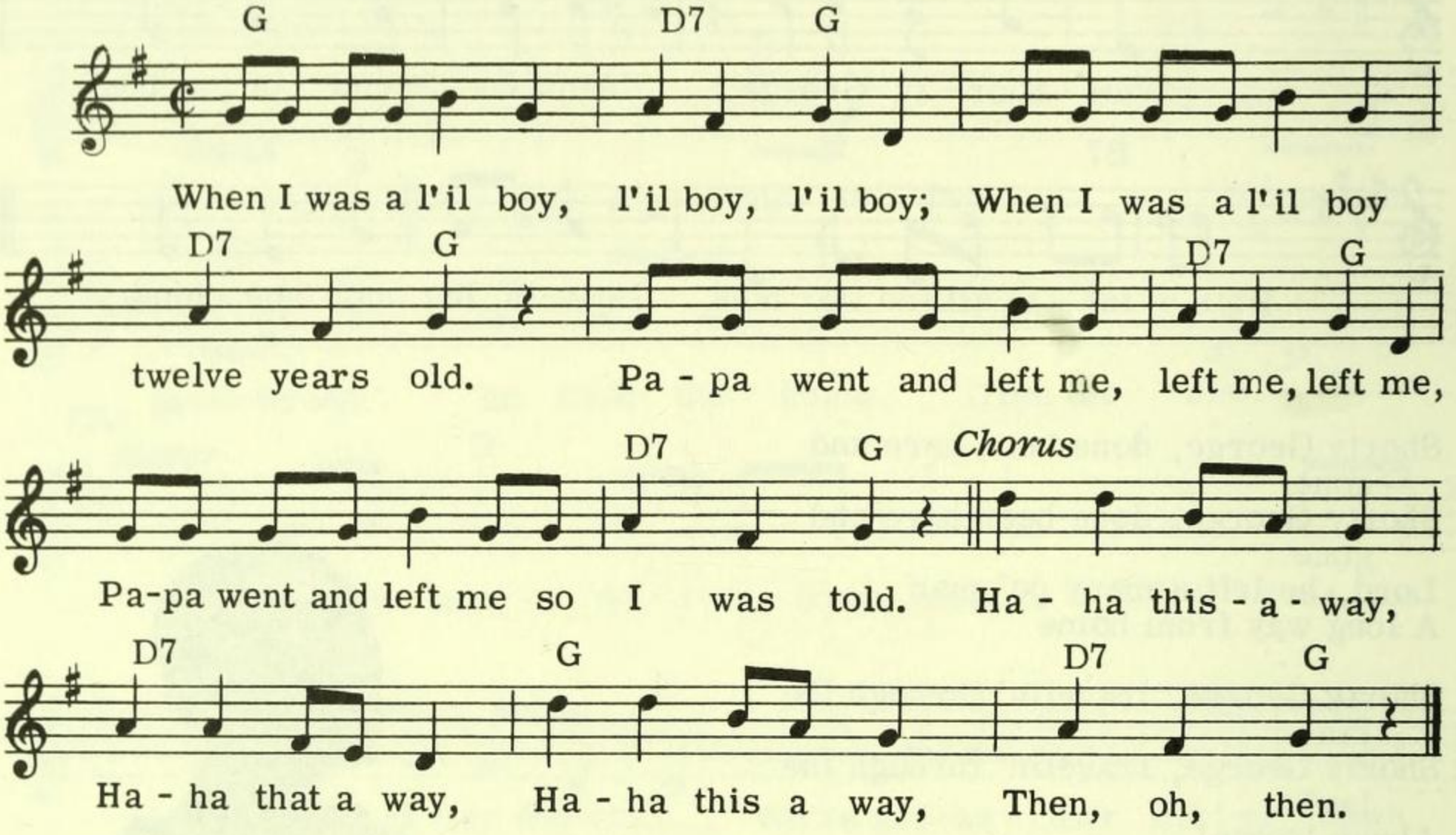
Shorty George, travelin' through the
lan'
Shorty George, travelin' through the
lan'
Alway lookin'
Pick some po' woman, man.

Well, Shorty George, ain't no friend
of mine (2x)
He's a pickin' all the women,
Leavin' the men behind.

You take Sal and I'll take Jane,
They're both good-looking but they ain't the same.

Ha-Ha This A-Way

Now this is a song the little children would sing long years ago — before they was free. They'd get around in the yards and play. They make a ring and they sing. They put one inside of the ring and as they go 'round and sing, they got hold of each other's hands. They sing "ha-ha this a-way" and "ha-ha that a-way." The one in the ring, he gonna jump that-a-way. And when he jumps that-a-way, the others gonna jump around the ring. And he gonna jump to the one and he gonna pick one by the hand and he gonna put him in the ring and he gonna get out in the ring with the other children and go around. And here's what they sing.


G D7 G
When I was a l'il boy, l'il boy, l'il boy; When I was a l'il boy
D7 G D7 G
twelve years old. Pa - pa went and left me, left me, left me,
D7 G Chorus
Pa-pa went and left me so I was told. Ha - ha this - a - way,
D7 G D7 G
Ha - ha that a way, Ha - ha this a way, Then, oh, then.

Mama come and got me, got me,
got me,
Mama come and got me to save my
soul.
Mama never whupped me, whupped
me, whupped me,
Mama never whupped me, so I was
told.

Chorus

I went to school, boy; school, boy;
school, boy;
I went to school when I was twelve
years old.
I obeyed the rules, the rules, the
rules,
I obeyed the rules, so I was told.

Chorus

I went to a teacher, teacher, teacher,
I went to a teacher to save my soul.
Teacher was a preacher, preacher,
preacher,
Teacher was a preacher, so I was
told.

Chorus

I learned my lesson, lesson, lesson,
I learned my lesson, to save my soul.
Wasn't that a blessin', blessin',
blessin',
Wasn't that a blessin' so I was told.

Chorus

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and
Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

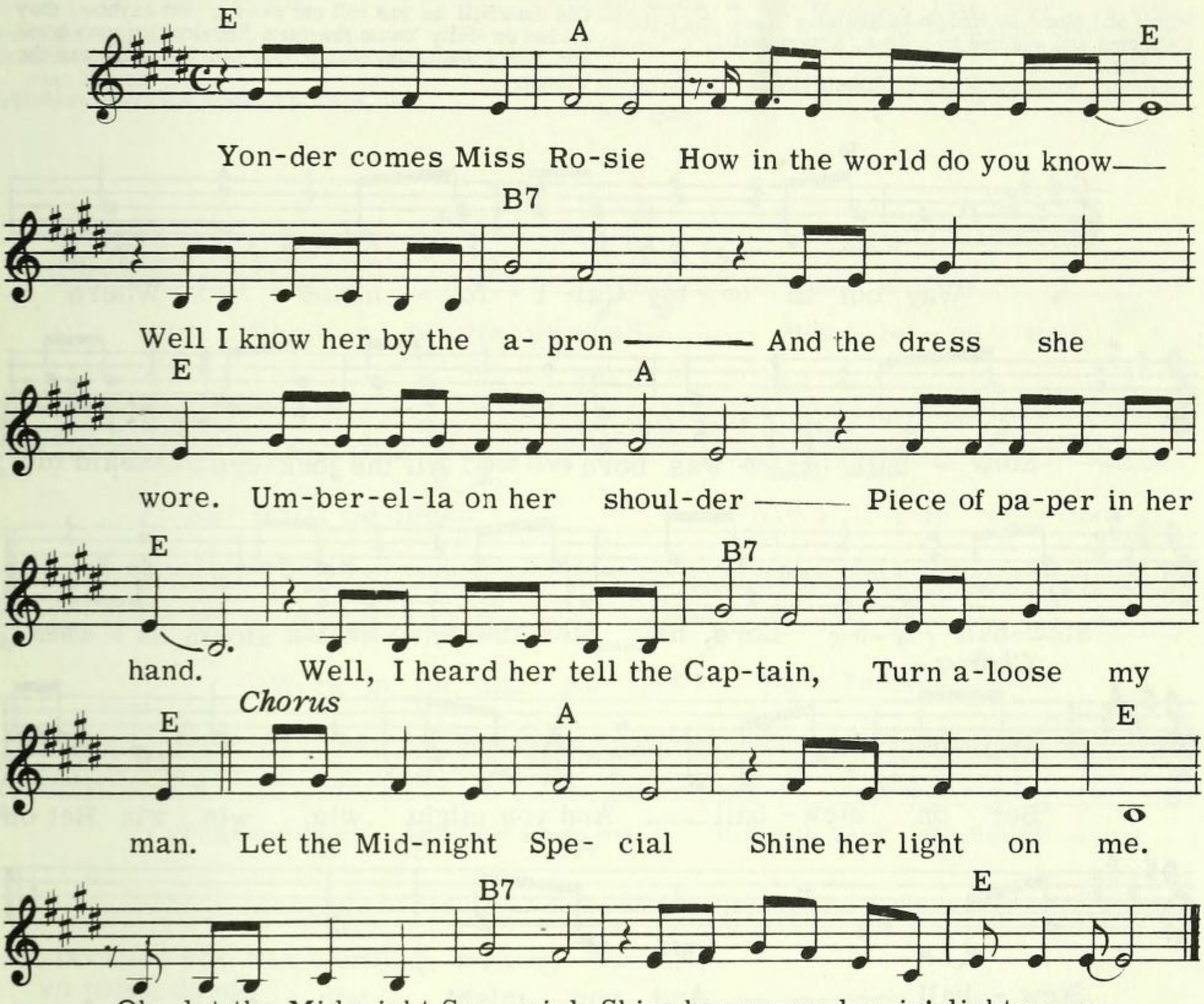
Midnight Special

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Now old Huddie Ledbetter, he was a mighty fine man,
Huddie taught this song to the whole wide land.

But now he's done with all his grieving, whooping,
hollering and a-crying,
He's done with all his studying, about his great long
time.

—Pete Seeger


E
A
E
Yon-der comes Miss Ro-sie How in the world do you know——
B7
Well I know her by the a- pron ——— And the dress she
E
A
wore. Um-ber-el-la on her shoul-der ——— Piece of pa-per in her
E
B7
hand. Well, I heard her tell the Cap-tain, Turn a-loose my
E
Chorus
A
E
man. Let the Mid-night Spe- cial Shine her light on me.
B7
E
Oh, let the Mid-night Spe -cial Shine her ev-er lov-in' light on me.

When you gets up in the morning
When that big bell ring.
You go marching to the table
You meet the same old thing.

Knife and fork are on the table
Ain't nothing in my pan.
And if you say a thing about
Your're in trouble with the man.

Chorus

If you ever go to Houston
Boys, you better walk right,
And you better not squabble
And you better not fight.

Benson Crocker will arrest you,
Jimmy Boone will take you down.

You can bet your bottom dollar
That you're Sugarland bound.

Well, jumping little Judy
She was a mighty fine girl.
She brought jumping
To the whole round world.

Well, she brought it in the morning
Just a while before day
Well, she brought me the news
That my wife was dead.

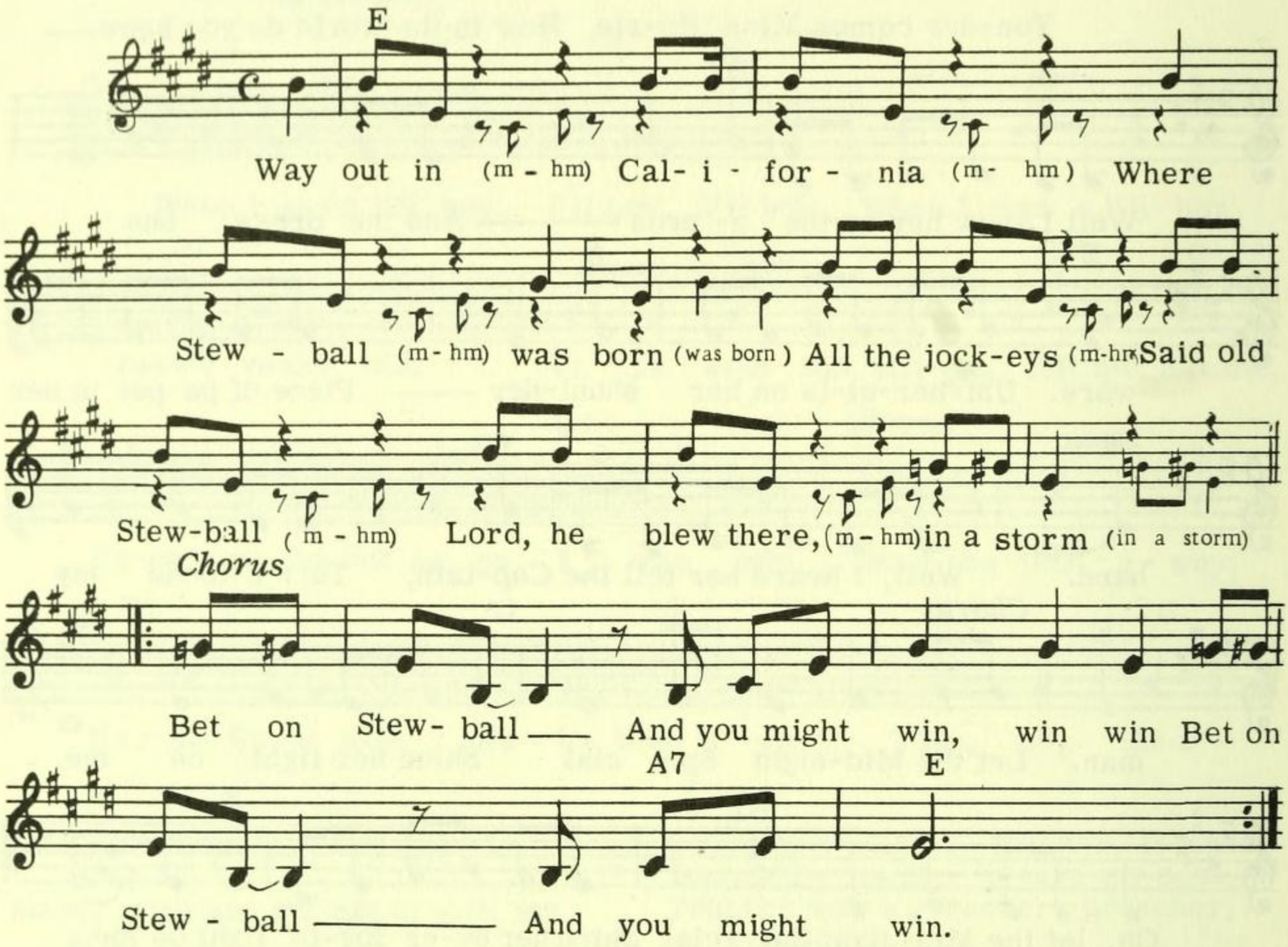
That started me to grieving,
Whopping, hollering and crying.
That started me to thinking
About my great long time.

Chorus

Stewball

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Stewball was the first racehorse ever come in the country. And he come in by California. Old Molly and Stewball was two horses that belonged to the same man. But when he was racing them two horses out in California, nobody did ever see those horses till they brought them out on the track. But when he bring them on the track, he give Molly to his brother and Stewball was his. He knowed Stewball could outrun Molly, but Molly was fine. Old Stewball he just roll out steady. But anyhow, they all bet on Molly 'cause she was a fine-looking gray horse and when the thing came out old Stewball was the winner.


E
Way out in (m - hm) Cal- i - for - nia (m- hm) Where
Stew - ball (m- hm) was born (was born) All the jock-eys (m-hm) Said old
Stew-ball (m - hm) Lord, he blew there, (m - hm) in a storm (in a storm)
Chorus
Bet on Stew- ball —— And you might win, win win Bet on
A7
E
Stew - ball ———— And you might win.

All the jockeys in the country say he
blew there in a storm
All the women in the country say he
never was known.

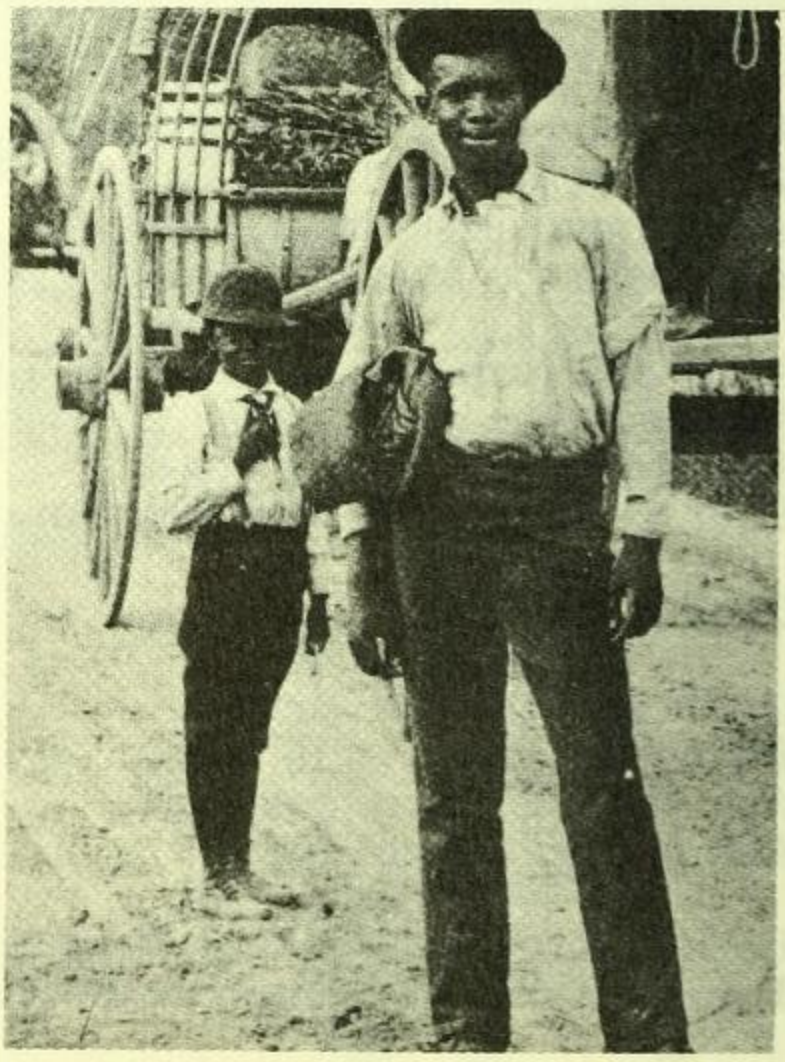
Chorus

When the horses were saddled and the
word was, "Give and go".
Old Stewball he shot out like an arrow
from a bow.

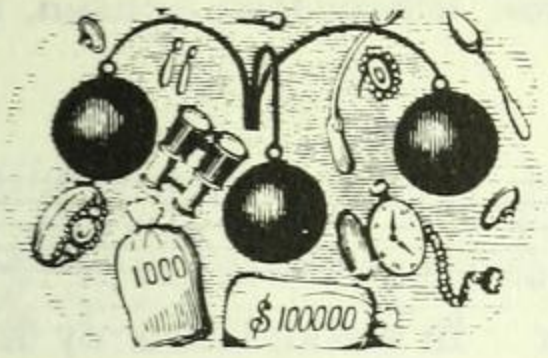
Chorus

They old folks they hollered, the young
folks they bawled
The children said, Look, look, at that
no good Stewball.

Chorus



National Defense Blues



Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
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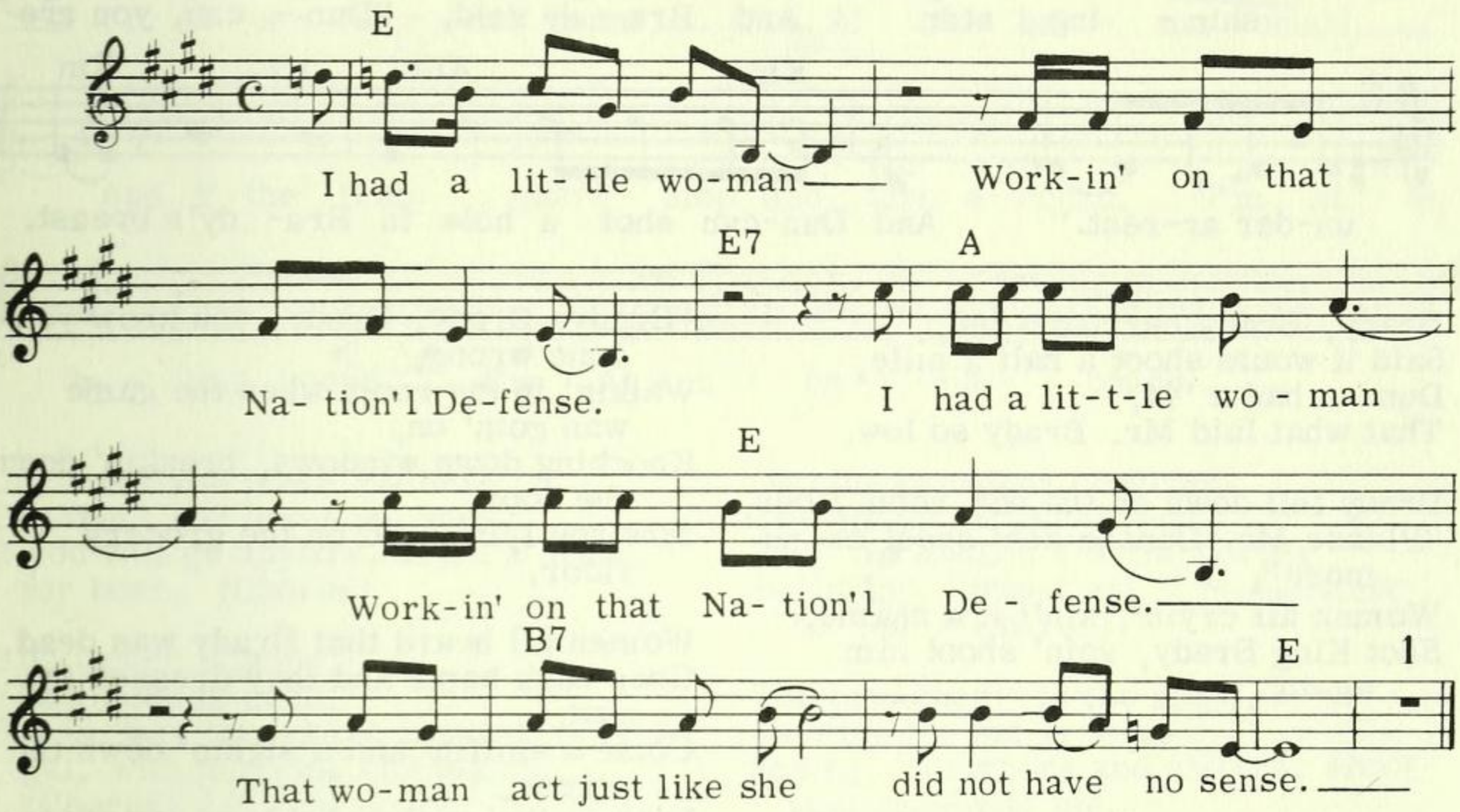
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

When I was out in California the boys told me, "Ledbetter, the women are working on that defense and they's making lots of money, just quitting their husbands." So a lot of the boys knowed I come from Louisiana - I met a man out there says, "Ledbetter, you know one thing, I come out here with my wife and you know she done quit me". I say, "Well". He say, "Well look, every payday come her check is big as mine". I say, "Well". He says, "Well look, every Saturday she putting her money in the bank." I say, "What then?" He say, "Well look, can't you make up a song." I say, "Well, I don't know, I'll think it over." And she was working on the defense, so here goes:


E
I had a lit- tle wo-man—— Work-in' on that
E7 A
Na- tion'l De-fense. I had a lit-t-le wo - man
E
Work-in' on that Na- tion'l De - fense.——
B7 E 1
That wo-man act just like she did not have no sense.——

Just because she was working, making so much dough
Just because she was working, making so much dough
That woman got to say she did not love me no more.

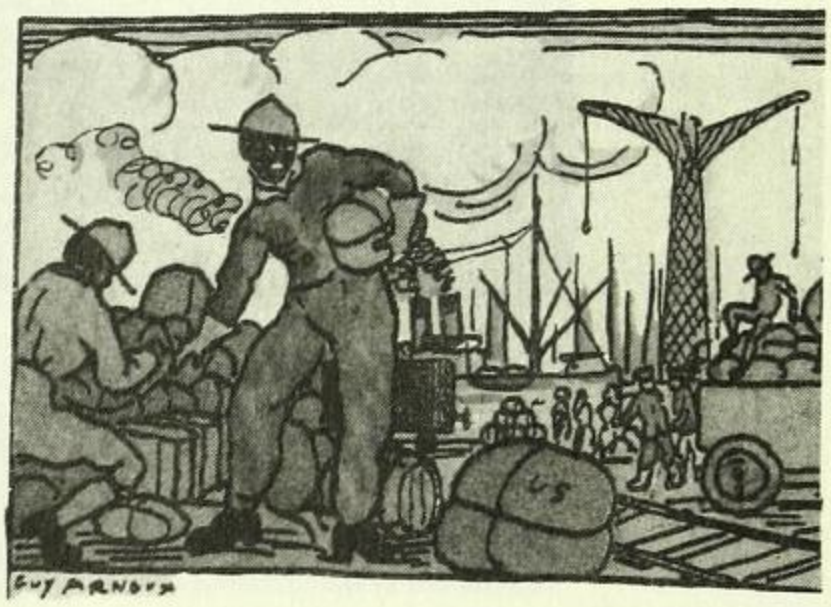
Every payday would come - her check was big as mine (2x)
That woman thought that defense was gonna last all the time.

That defense is gone, just listen to my song (2x)
Since that defense is gone that woman done lose her home.

I will tell the truth and it's got to be a fact (2x)
Since that defense is gone that woman lose her Cadillac.

Spoken:

That's the defense blues, yes sir. Fast bass and just words and music put together like addition. You get down your words and then you get your tune and your music. Then you just add it up and you got a song. It's easy.



Duncan and Brady

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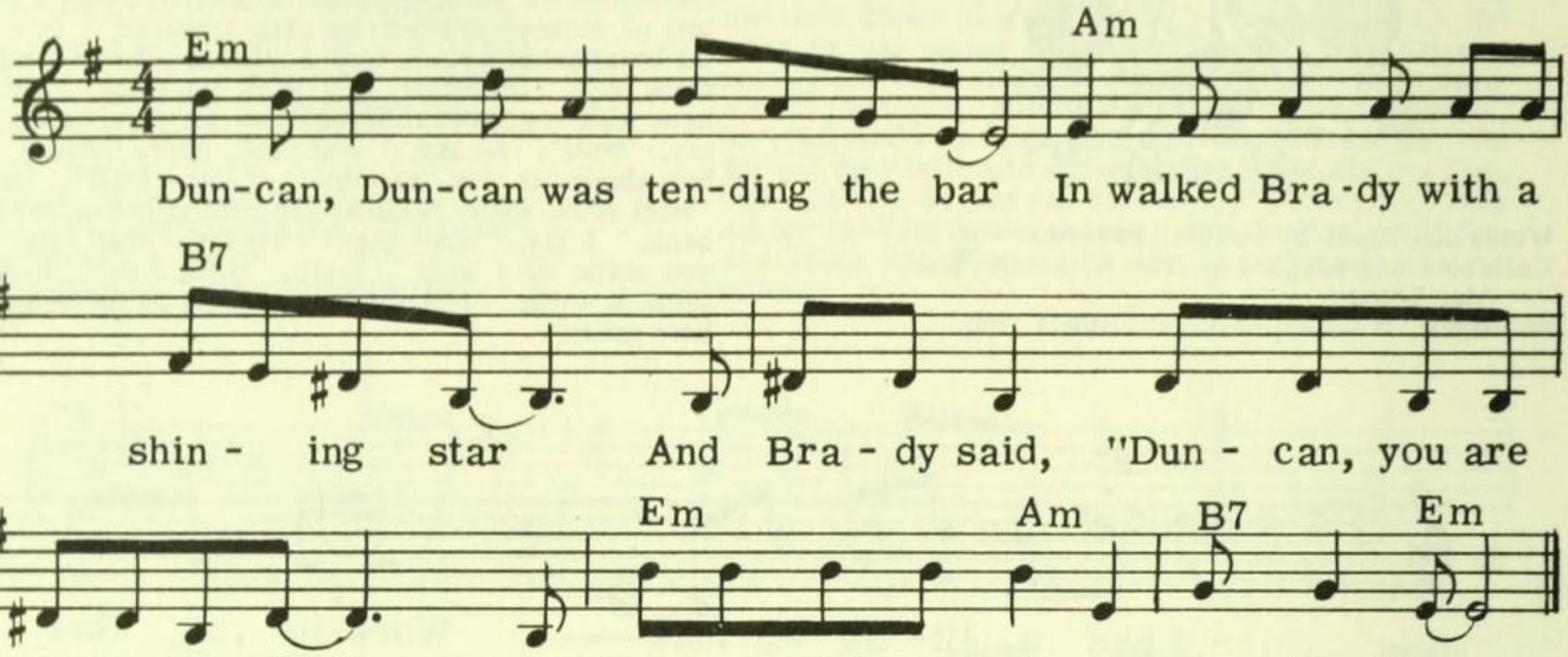
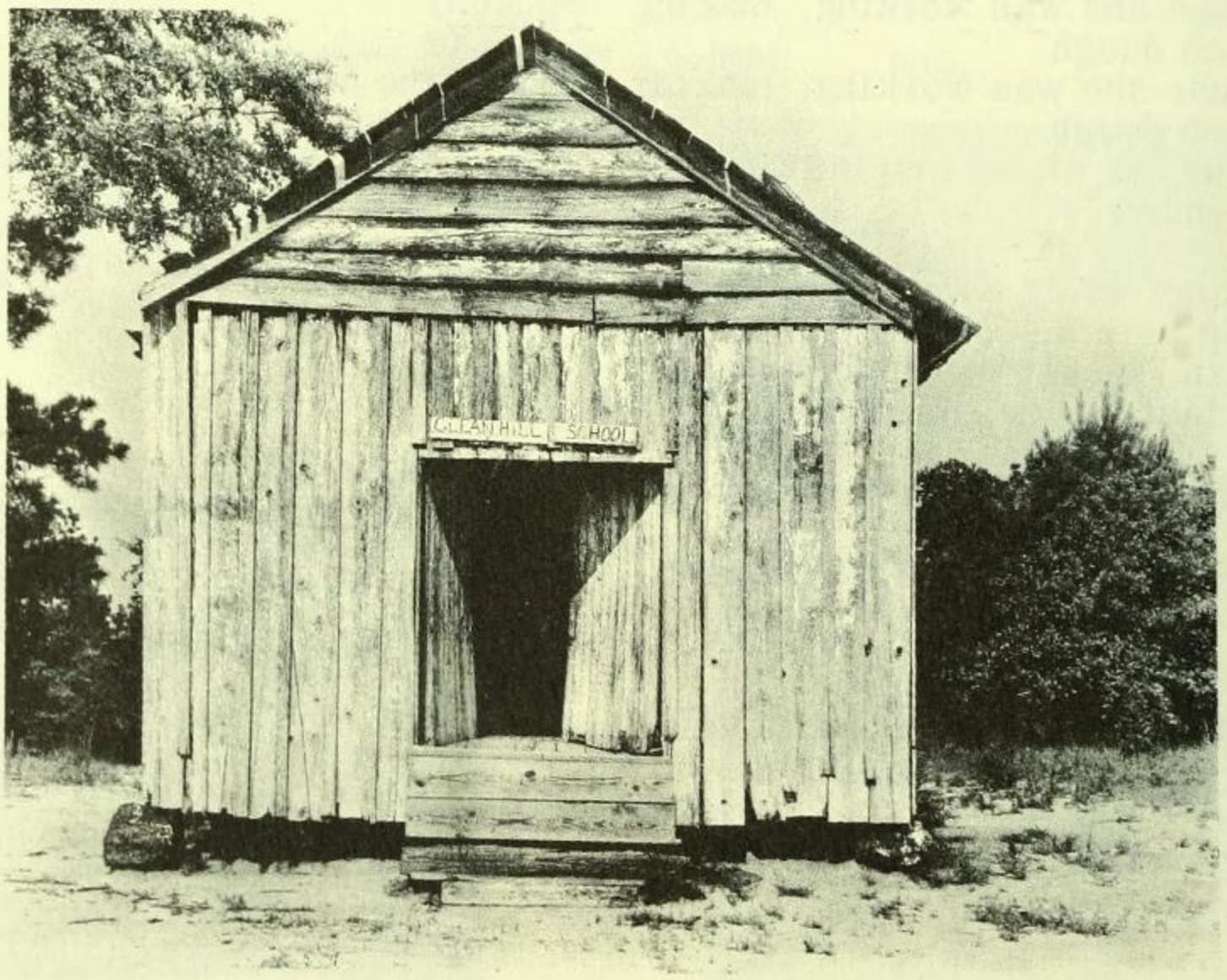

Em
Am
Dun-can, Dun-can was ten-ding the bar In walked Bra-dy with a
B7
shin - ing star And Bra - dy said, "Dun - can, you are
Em
Am
B7
Em
un-der ar-rest." And Dun-can shot a hole in Bra- dy's breast.

Brady, Brady carried a '45,
Said it would shoot a half a mile,
Duncan had a '44,
That what laid Mr. Brady so low.

Brady fell down on the bar-room floor,
"Please Mr. Duncan don' shoot me no more",
Women all cryin', ain't it a shame,
Shot King Brady, goin' shoot him again.

"Brady, Brady, Brady, you know you done wrong,
Walkin' in the room when the game was goin' on,
Knocking down windows, breakin' down the door,
Now you lyin' dead on the grocery floor.

Women all heard that Brady was dead,
Goes back home and they dresses in red.
Come a sniffin' and a sighin' down the street,
In their big mother hubbard and their stockin' feet.



Alabama Bound

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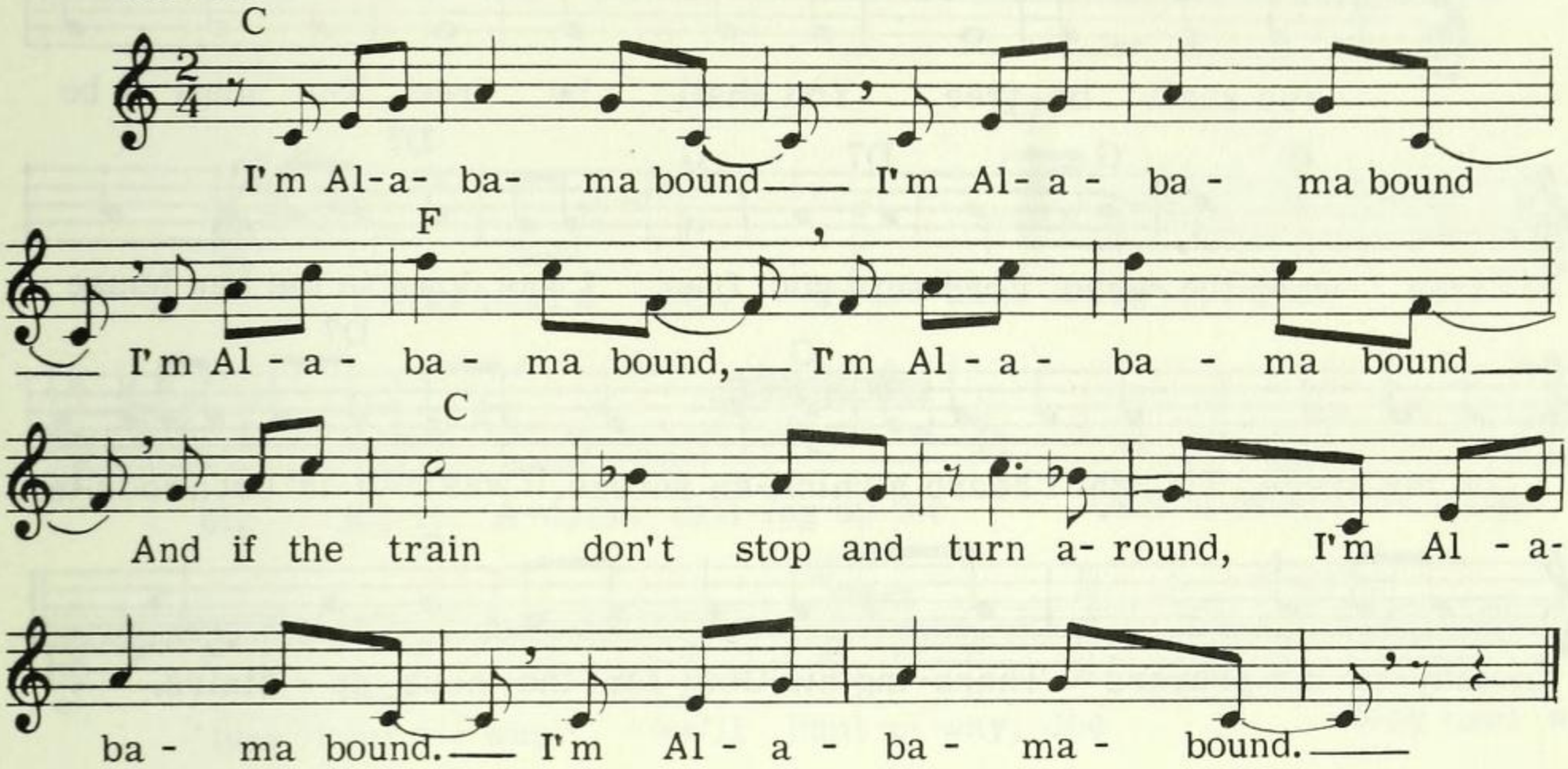
Chorus:


C
I'm Al-a- ba- ma bound I'm Al- a - ba - ma bound
F
I'm Al - a - ba - ma bound, I'm Al - a - ba - ma bound
C
And if the train don't stop and turn a- round, I'm Al - a-
ba - ma bound. I'm Al - a - ba - ma - bound.

Oh, don't you leave me here,
Oh, don't you leave me here.
If you will go anyhow, leave a dime
for beer. (Chorus)

Ella Green is gone,
Ella Green is gone,
She is 'way 'cross the country, sweet
gal, with her long clothes on.
(Chorus)

Oh, the preacher preached,
The sister turned around,
Yes, the deacon's in the corner
Hollerin", "Sweet gal, I'm Alabama
bound!" (Chorus)

The preacher's in the stand,
Passing his hat around,
Saying, "Brothers and sisters, shoot
your money to me,
I'm Alabama bound." (Chorus)

We Shall Be Free

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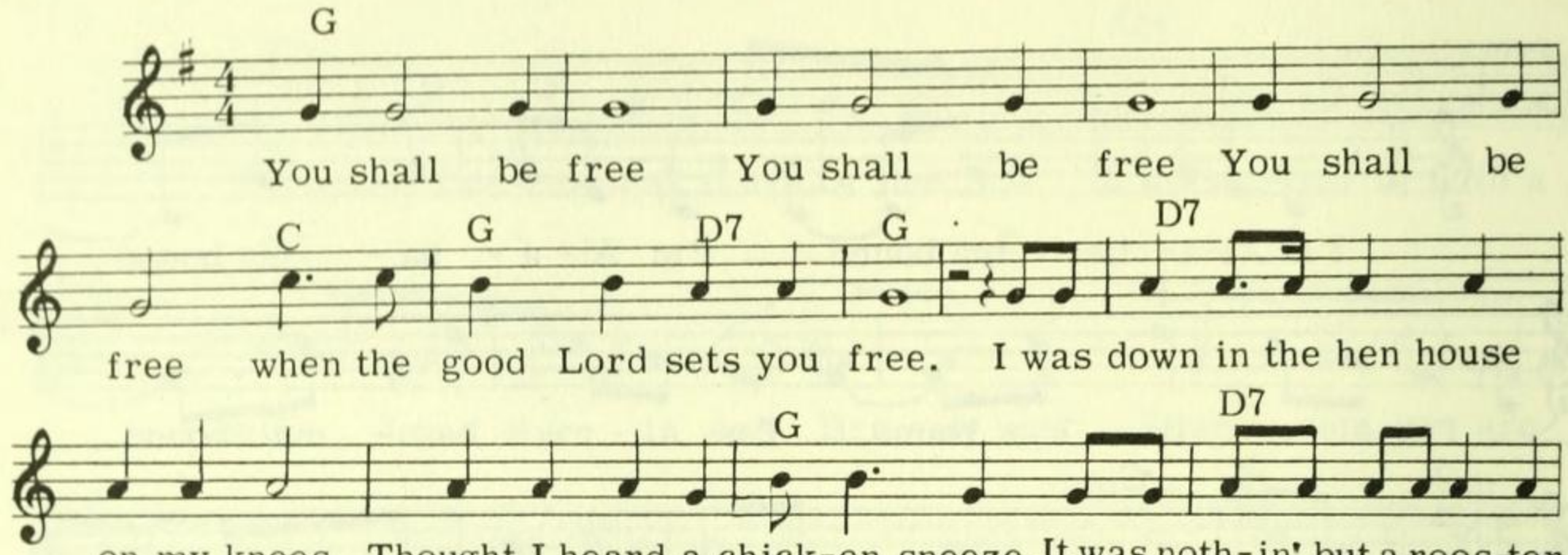

G
You shall be free You shall be free You shall be
C G D7 G D7
free when the good Lord sets you free. I was down in the hen house
G D7
on my knees, Thought I heard a chick-en sneeze. It was noth-in' but a roos-ter
G
say-in' his prayers Thank-ing his God for the hens up - stairs.

Chorus:

In the morning you shall be free,
I done told you - you shall be free.
I done said it - you shall be free,
When the good Lord sets you free.

Well, some folks say times is hard,
Preacher says, "Put your trust in God."
Man knows the difference, can't you see -
A hog can't run just as fast as me.
(Chorus)

Ain't no use me working so hard,
I got a woman in the rich folks yard.
When they kill a chicken she send me the head,
She thinks I'm working, I'm laying up in bed.
... Taking it easy.
... Two other women.
... I thought you knowed it.
(Chorus)

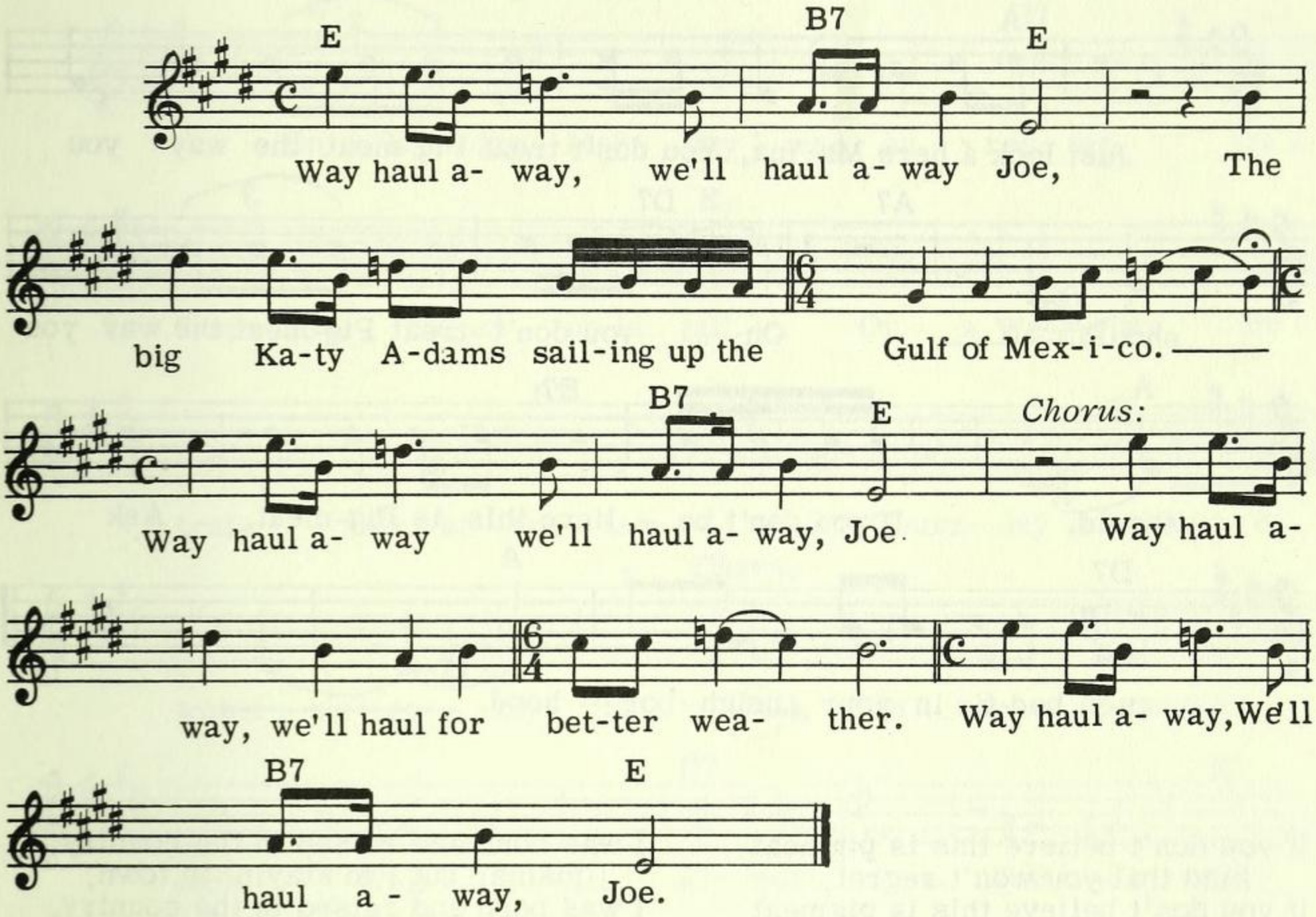
Well, you see that preacher a setting on a log,
Finger on the trigger and his eye on a hog.
Pulls that trigger and the gun went zip,
Grabbed that hog with all of his grip.
... Getting a hog eye.
...Getting them chitlings.
(Chorus)

Ain't no use me a-working so hard,
I got a woman in the rich folk's yard.
When they kill a chicken, she sends me the feet,
She things I'm working, I'm a-walking the street. (Chorus)

Haul Away Joe

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Before you sail on a boat, the big Kate Adams, you got to load it first. And then when you load the boat you sail. And when you sail the boat, they gonna sing.


E
B7
E
Way haul a- way, we'll haul a- way Joe, The
big Ka-ty A-dams sail-ing up the Gulf of Mex-i-co.
B7
E
Chorus:
Way haul a- way we'll haul a- way, Joe. Way haul a-
way, we'll haul for bet-ter wea- ther. Way haul a- way, We'll
B7
E
haul a - way, Joe.

I'm sailin' up the Mississippi in the big
Chief Adams

Chorus

Way haul away, we'll haul for stormy
weather.

Chorus

I was sailin' up the Mexico and Hona-lu-la.

Chorus

Way haul away for better weather.

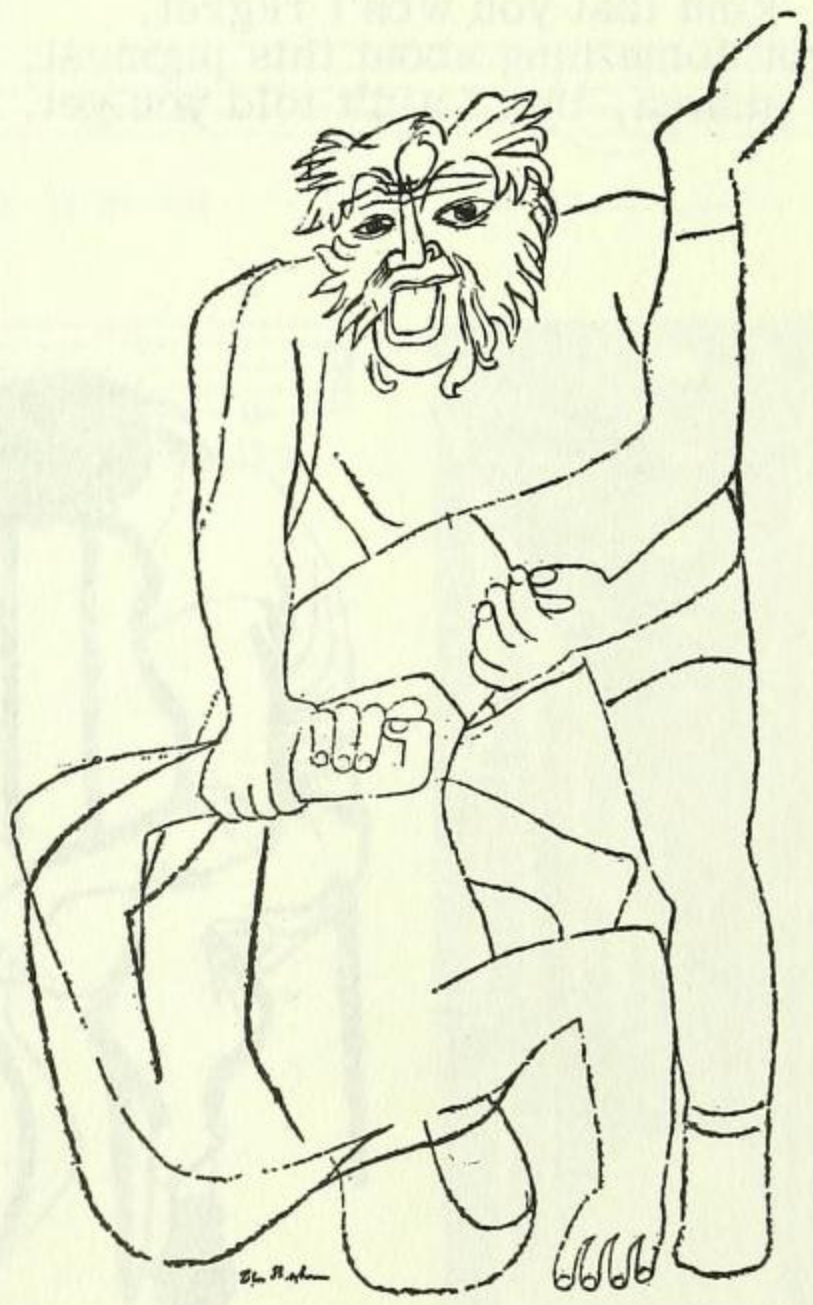
Chorus

I'm a-sailin' up the river in the big
Chief Adams

Chorus

I think I heard the captain say boy, you
better work in a hurry!

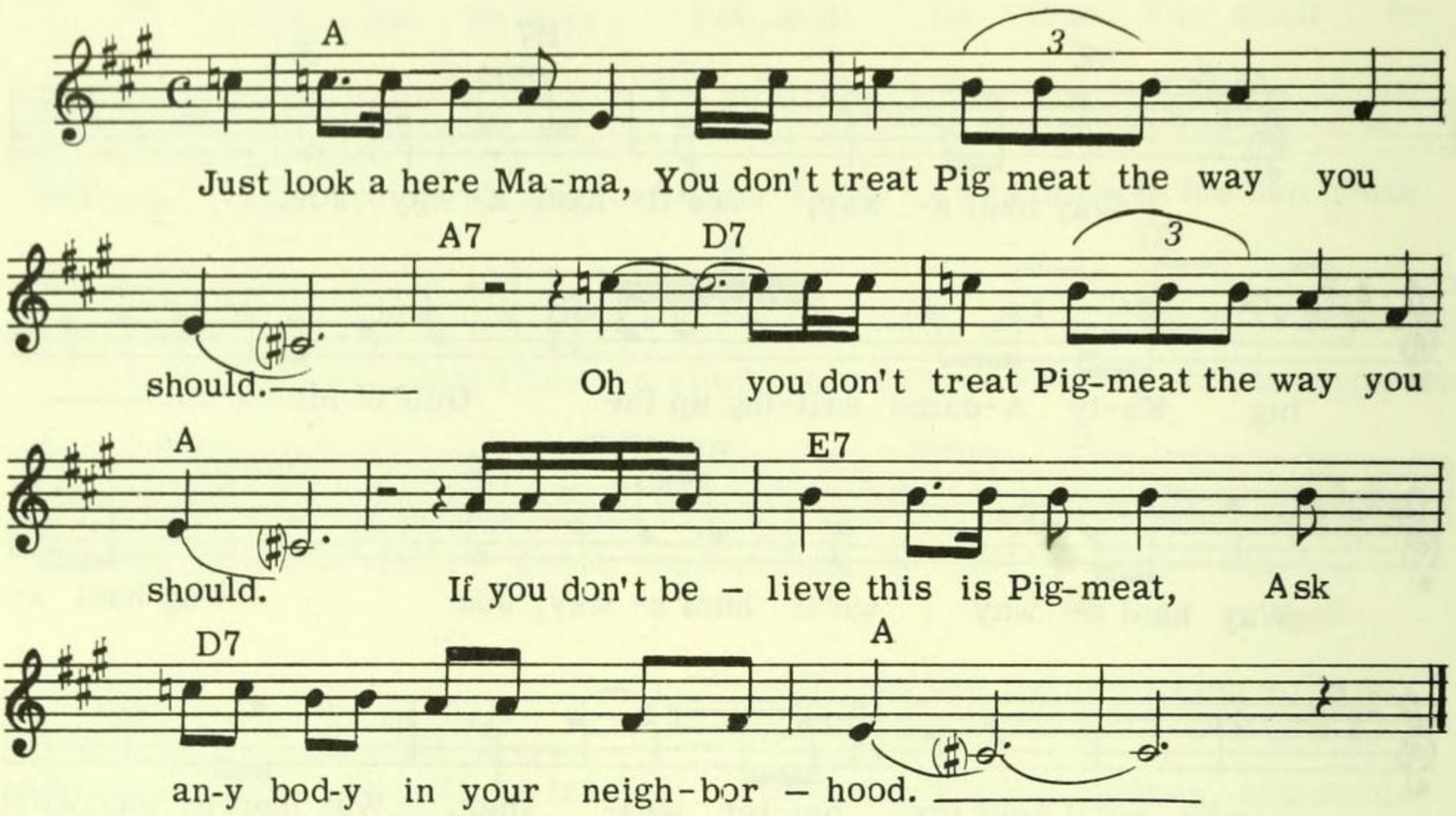
Chorus



Pigmeat

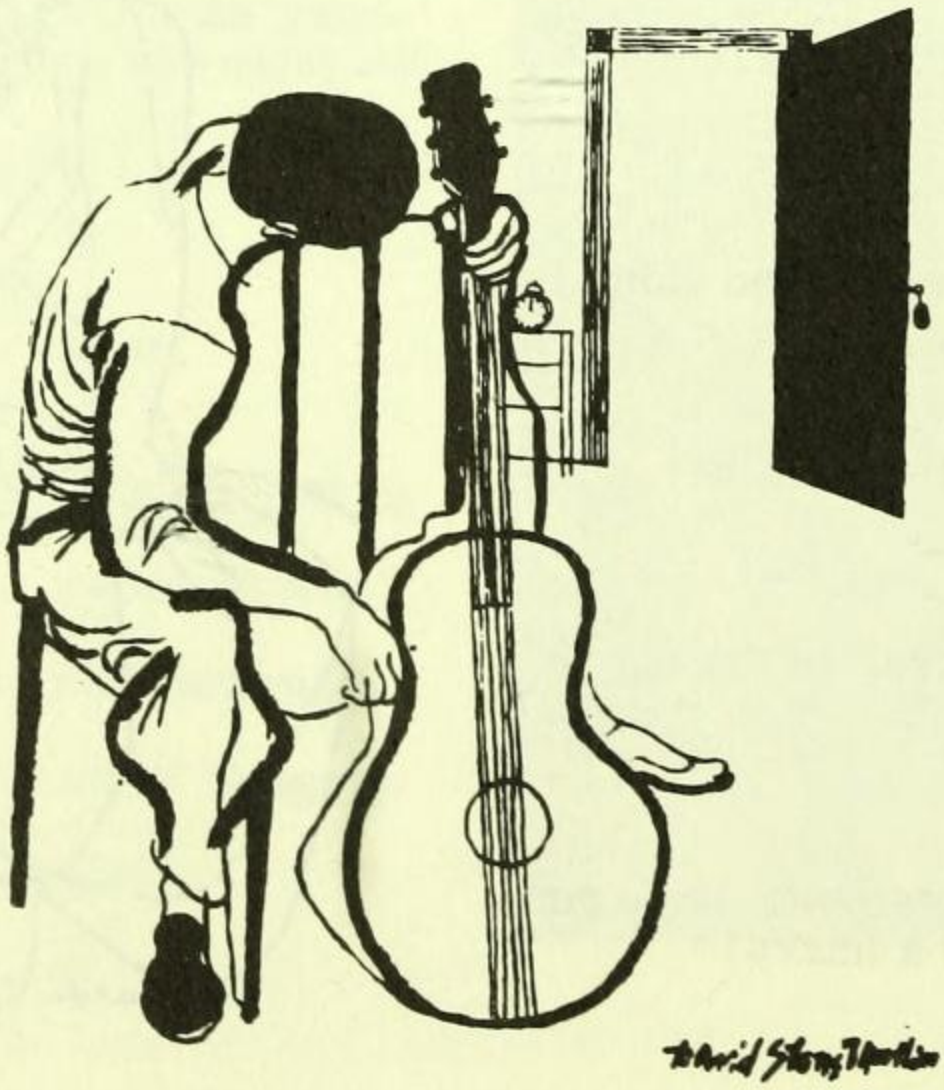
Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

I was born and raised in the country, mama, but I'm stayin' in town — in New York City, that's what I'm talkin' about.


A
Just look a here Ma-ma, You don't treat Pig meat the way you
A7
D7
should. Oh you don't treat Pig-meat the way you
A
E7
should. If you don't be - lieve this is Pig-meat, Ask
D7
A
an-y bod-y in your neigh-bor - hood.

If you don't believe this is pigmeat
kind that you won't regret,
If you don't believe this is pigmeat
kind that you won't regret,
I got something about this pigmeat,
mama, that I ain't told you yet.

I was born and raised in the country,
mama, but I'm stayin' in town,
I was born and raised in the country,
mama, but I'm stayin' in town.
If you don't believe this is pigmeat,
mama, from my head on down.

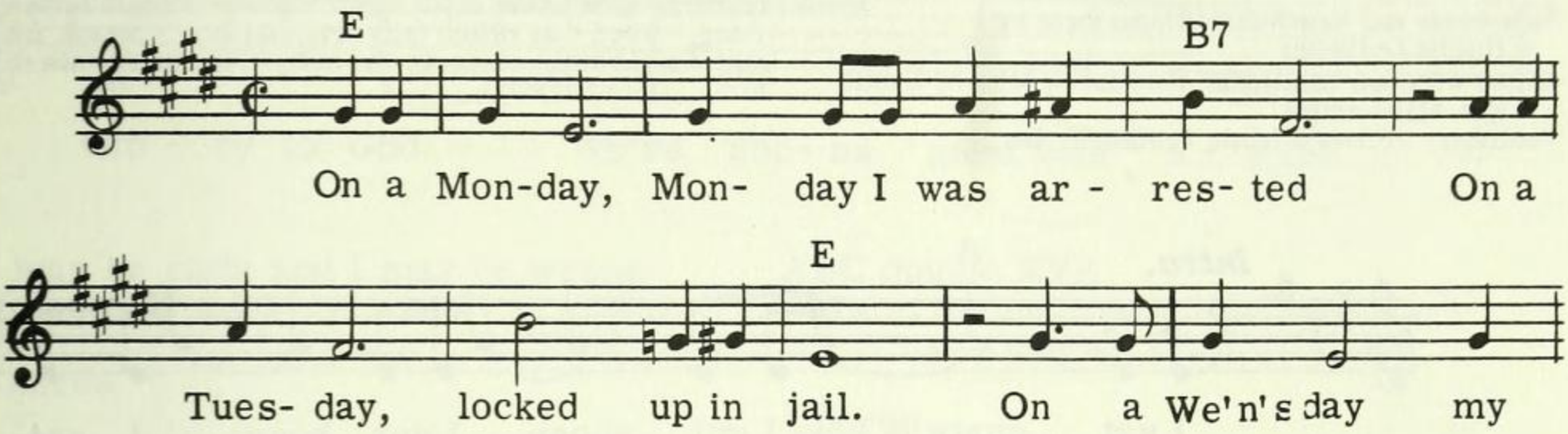


On A Monday

(ALMOST DONE)

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Collected and adapted by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

In slavery times, they had so many ways of sayin' about the man, he didn't know what it was all about.


E
B7
On a Mon-day, Mon- day I was ar - res- ted On a
E
Tues- day, locked up in jail. On a We'n's day my
B7
trail was at - tes- ted on a Thurs- day no - bo - dy
E
Chorus
would - n't go my bail. Well, it's all, Al - most
B7
E
done. Well it's all - Al- most done. Well, it's all
B7
Al - most done, And I aint gon-na ring them
E
yel - low wom - en's door bells.

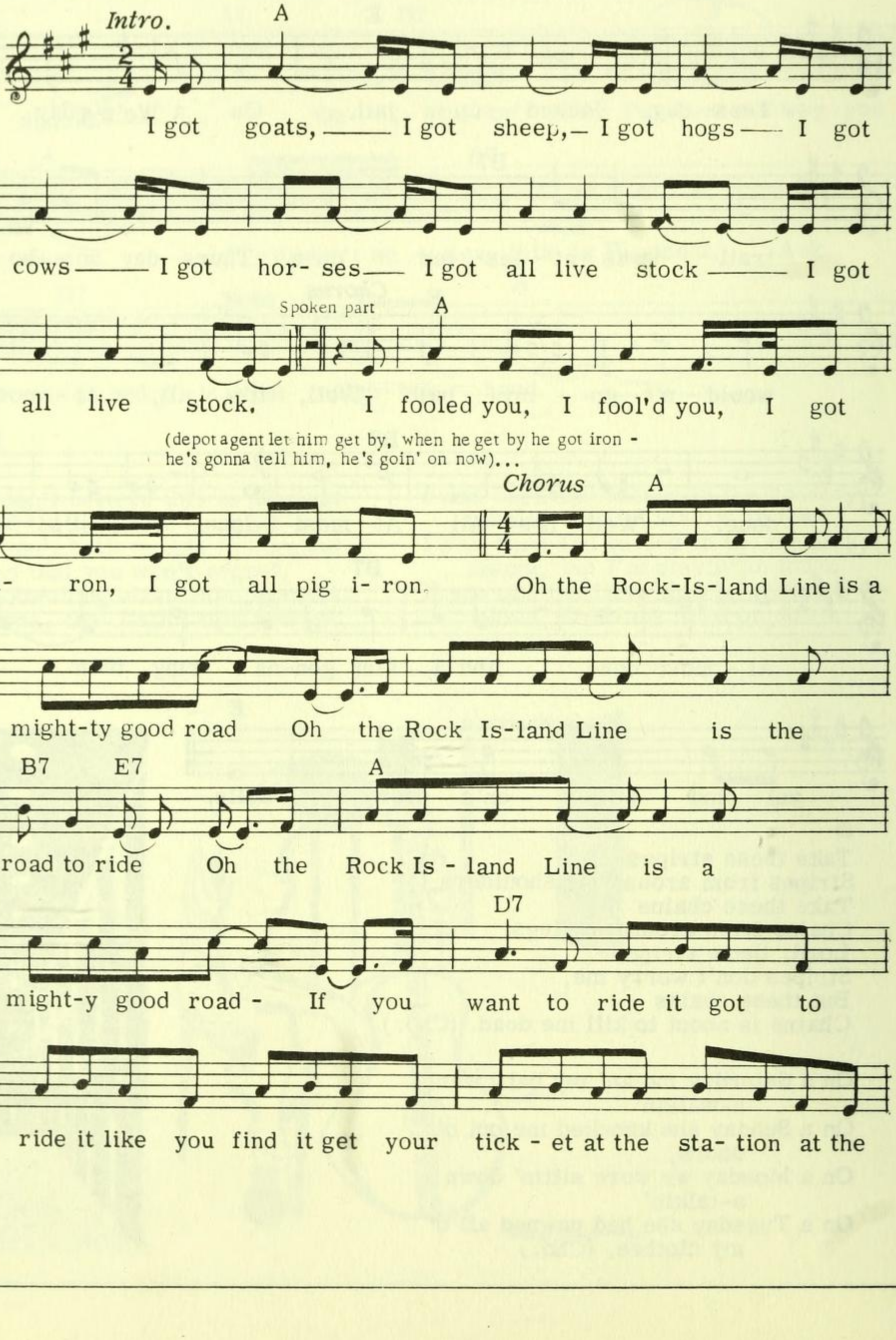
Take these stripes
Stripes from around my shoulders,
Take these chains
Chains from around my legs.
Lord, these stripes
Stripes don't worry me,
But these chains
Chains is about to kill me dead. (Cho.)

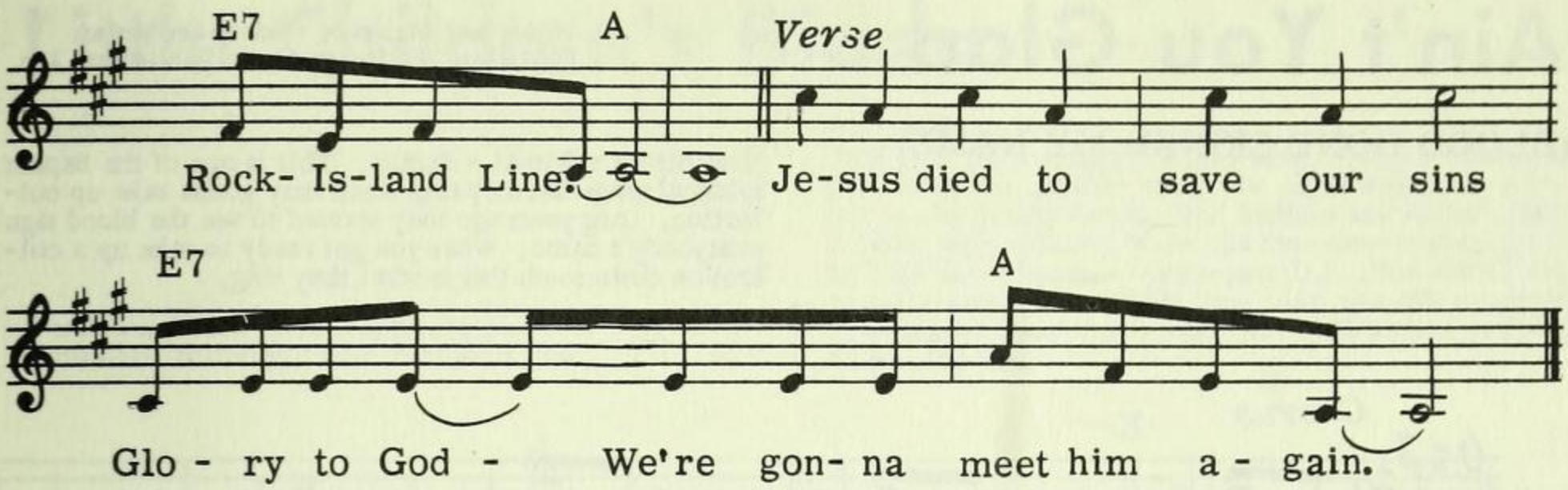
On a Saturday me an' my baby went
a-walkin'
On a Sunday she knocked me out o'
doors,
On a Monday we were sittin' down
a-talkin'
On a Tuesday she had pawned all o'
my clothes. (Cho.)

Rock Island Line

New words and New Music arrangement by
Huddie Ledbetter
Edited with new additional material by John A. Lomax
and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Now boys I'm gonna sing about that Rock Island Line, which is a mighty good road to ride. And in that road the man gonna talk to the depot agent when he's coming out of the cut with the Rock Island Line freight train - coming back along a new lane thisaway. That man blows his whistle down there different than men blow whistles here, 'cause he talks to the depot agent - gonna tell him something. When that switch falls over that line - means for that freight train to go in the hole. Man gonna talk to him...(into INTRO)...


Intro.
A
I got goats, — I got sheep,— I got hogs — I got
cows — I got hor- ses — I got all live stock — I got
Spoken part
A
all live stock. I fooled you, I fool'd you, I got
(depot agent let him get by, when he get by he got iron -
he's gonna tell him, he's goin' on now)...
Chorus
A
i- ron, I got all pig i- ron. Oh the Rock-Is-land Line is a
might-ty good road Oh the Rock Is-land Line is the
B7
E7
A
road to ride Oh the Rock Is - land Line is a
D7
might-y good road - If you want to ride it got to
ride it like you find it get your tick - et at the sta- tion at the

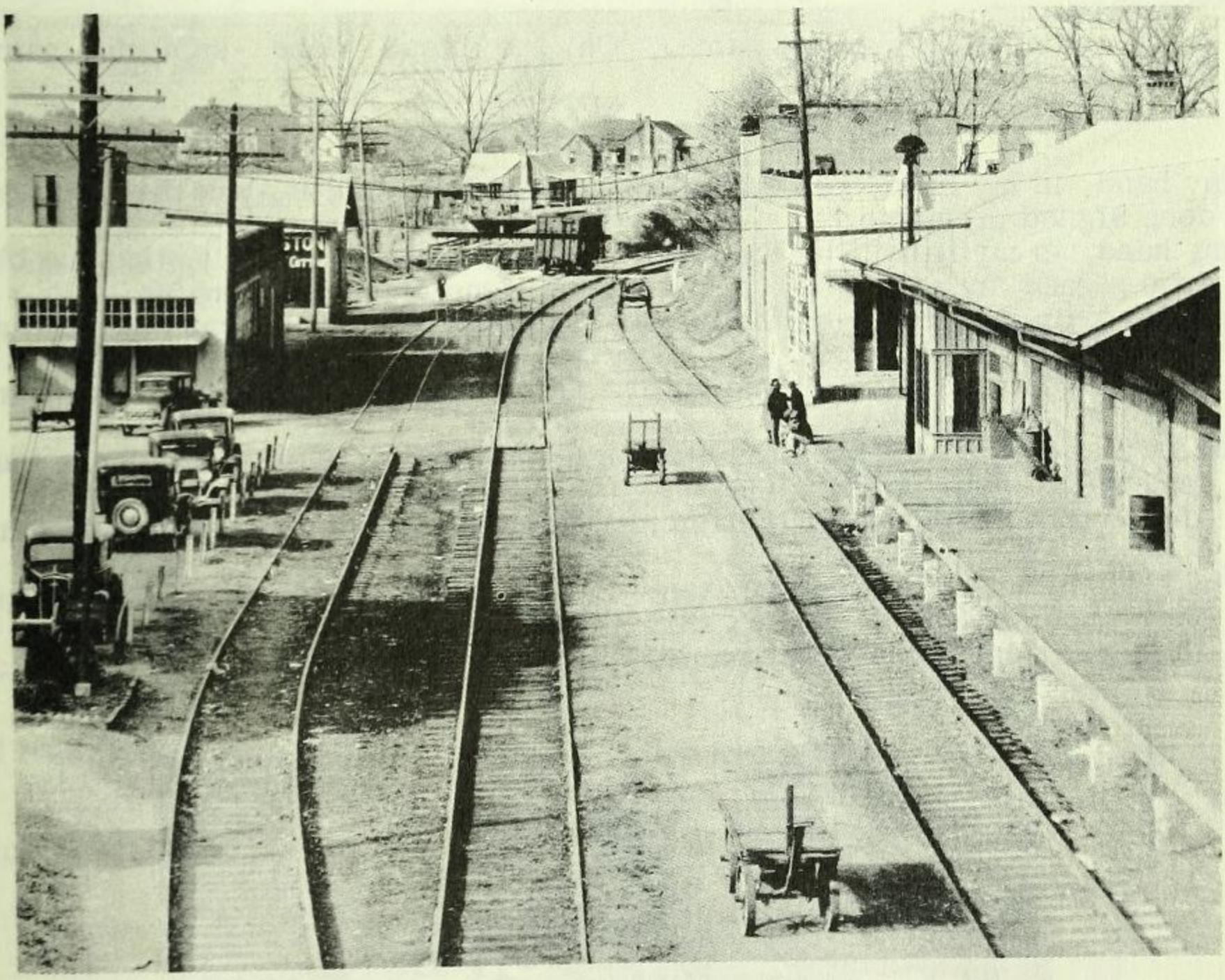


I may be right and I may be wrong
You gonna miss me when I'm gone.

Chorus

ABC double XYZ
Cats in the cupboard, but they don't see me.

Chorus

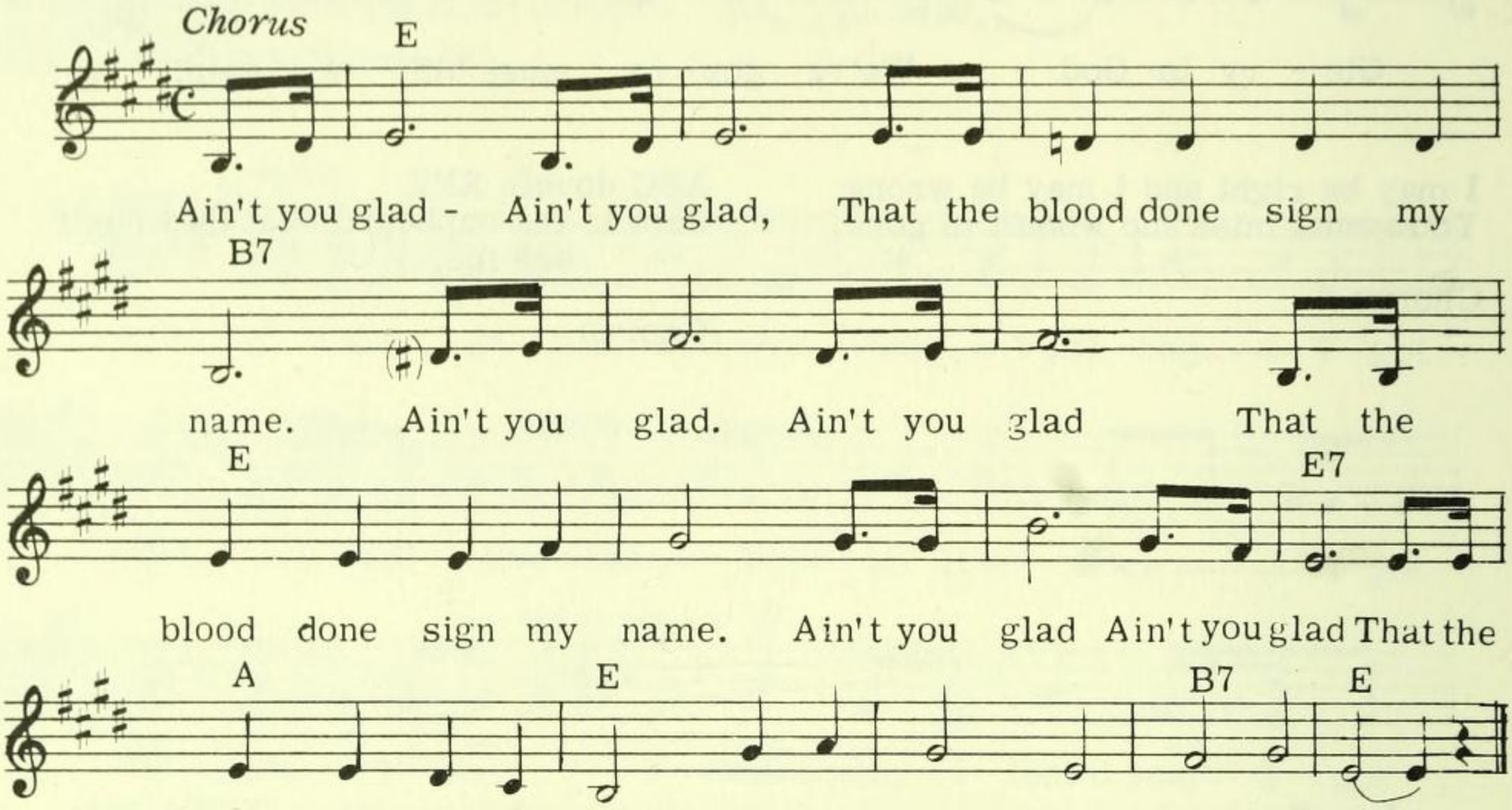


Ain't You Glad

(BLOOD DONE SIGNED MY NAME)

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Now this is a spiritual - Baptist. This is one of the Baptist spiritual songs that they sing when they gonna take up collection. Long years ago they wanted to see the blood sign everybody's name. When you get ready to take up a collection down south this is what they sing.


Chorus
E
Ain't you glad - Ain't you glad, That the blood done sign my
B7
name. Ain't you glad. Ain't you glad That the
E
E7
blood done sign my name. Ain't you glad Ain't you glad That the
A
E
B7
E
blood done sign my name. Oh, the blood done sign my name.

In my hand, in my hand, yes the blood
done signed my name,
In my hand, in my hand, yes the blood
done signed my name,
In my hand, in my hand, yes the blood
done signed my name,
Oh, the blood done signed my name.

On the wall, on the wall, yes the blood
done signed your name, (3x)
Oh, the blood done signed your name.

In the heaven, in the heaven, yes the
blood done signed your name, (3x)
Oh, the blood done signed your name.

I said it, I said it, yes the blood done
signed your name,
And I read it, I read it, that the blood
done signed your name.
I read it, I said it, that the blood done
signed your
Oh, the blood done signed your name.

Over yonder, over yonder, yes the
blood done signed your name, (3x)
Oh, the blood done signed your name.

Little Children's Blues

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

This is a little children's play song. They all going to part from one another tomorrow night when they come out of the cotton fields. The mothers and fathers going to take their children home and the other mothers going to take theirs home. They separating. Now they going to walk around in a little ring play and bid everyone good night. And this is what they walk around and sing to one another.

G
As I went down the rail - road
G7 C C7 G
track when that train came a - roll— in' — by——
G7 C G
I waved my hand at the girl that I love'd Spoken (My
D7 G
ma - ma) Hung down my head and I cried.—

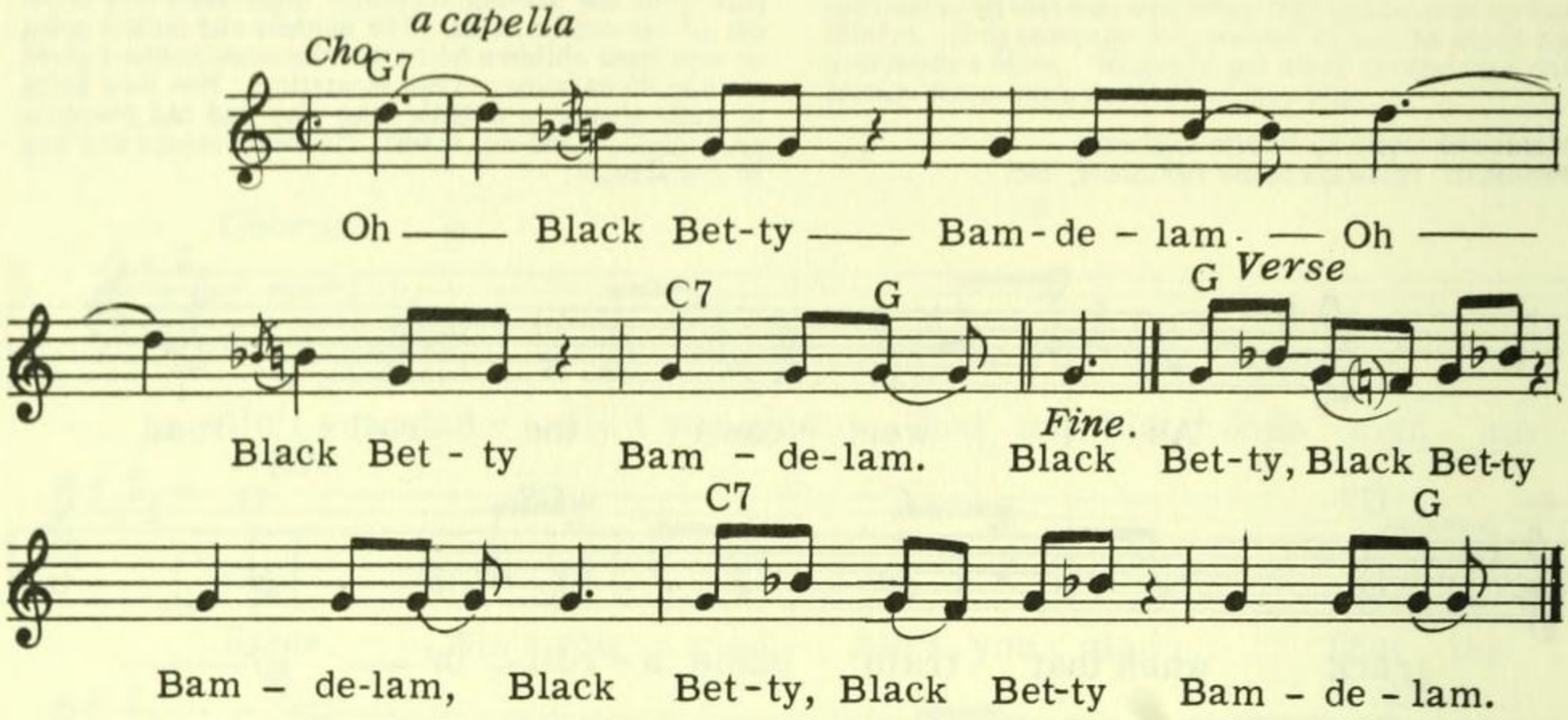
My mama she's gone, my mama' she's
gone.
And she left me to weep and moan.
She left me to weep and moan.
Just to think about my poor mother's
gone.

I went down to the freight depot when
that train come a rolling by
I waved my hand at my mama that I
loved,
Hung down my head and I cried.

She's gone, she's gone, She's gone,
she's gone,
And no cryin won't bring her back,
She's the only mother that I ever did
love,
Going down that railroad track

Black Betty

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.



Jump steady Black Betty,
Jump steady Black Betty

Chorus

Look-a yonder, Black Betty (2)

Turn around, Black Betty
Jump down, Black Betty.

Black Betty had a baby,
Little thing went crazy.

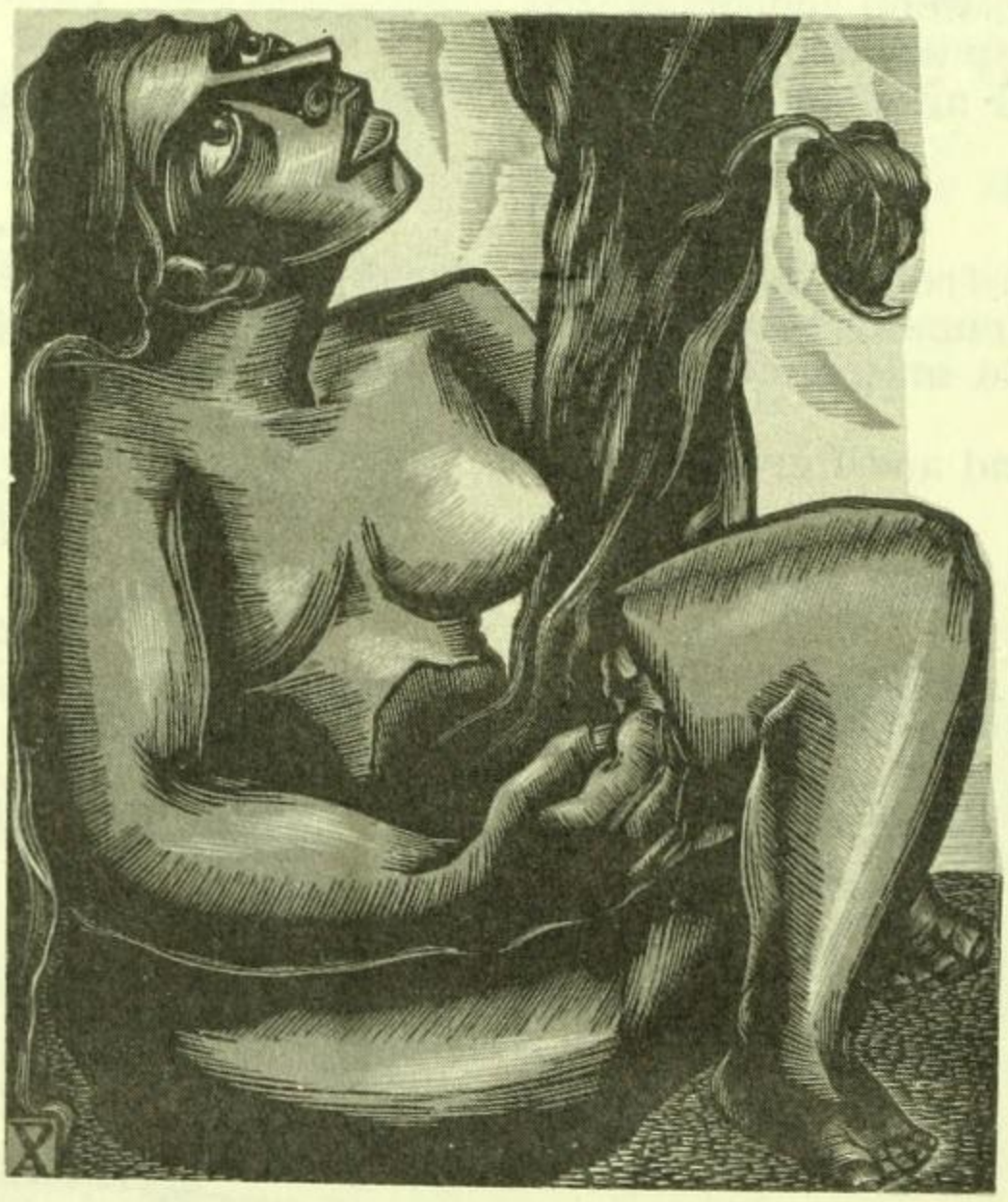
Jump steady, Black Betty (2)

Little thing went blind (2)

Said it wasn't none of mine (2)

What about it, Black Betty? (2)

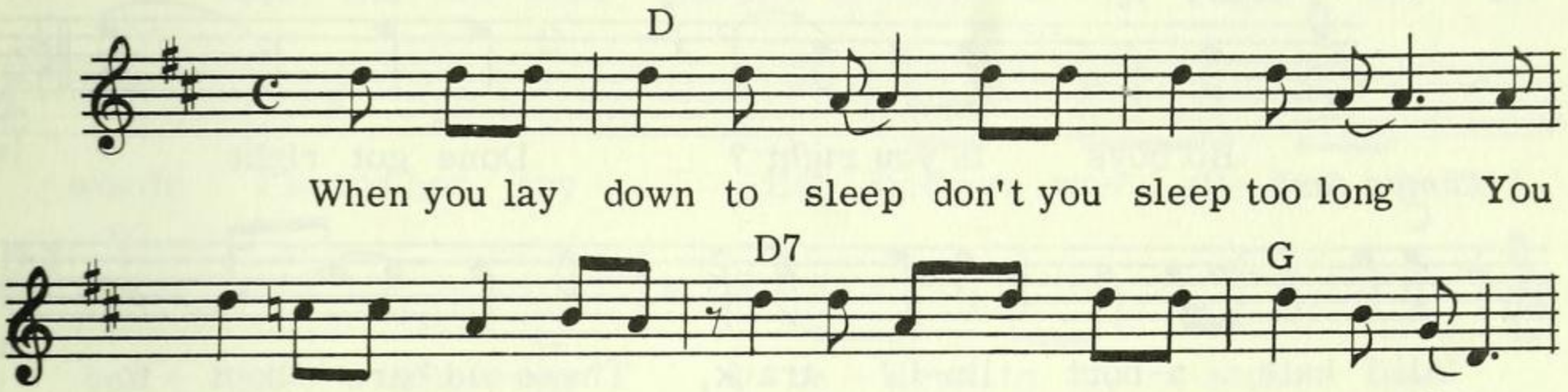
Run yonder, Black Betty
Turn around, Black Betty



Don't Sleep Too Long

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

(This) number is going to be dedicated to my little wife which is half my life. My guitar is called kill-a-car and that's the other half. And when you sleep, don't sleep too long 'cause you can't tell what's going on. You wake up once in a while 'cause your house might catch on fire and you get burned up. So just listen to these blues. I made this when they tore down the 6th Ave. El.


D
When you lay down to sleep don't you sleep too long You
D7
G
can't ne- ver tell what is go- in' on, when you lay down to sleep
D
Please don't sleep too long (spoken:) (Y our house might catch on fire
Better wake up once in a while)
Cause you can
A7
D
nev- er tell. - What is go in on.

She ain't so good looking and she don't
dress so fine
But what make me love her, she is so
good and kind.

She ain't so good looking and she don't
dress so fine
But what make me love her, she is so
good and kind.

You can go to bed early , and early
rise,
It will make you healthy, wealthy and
wise

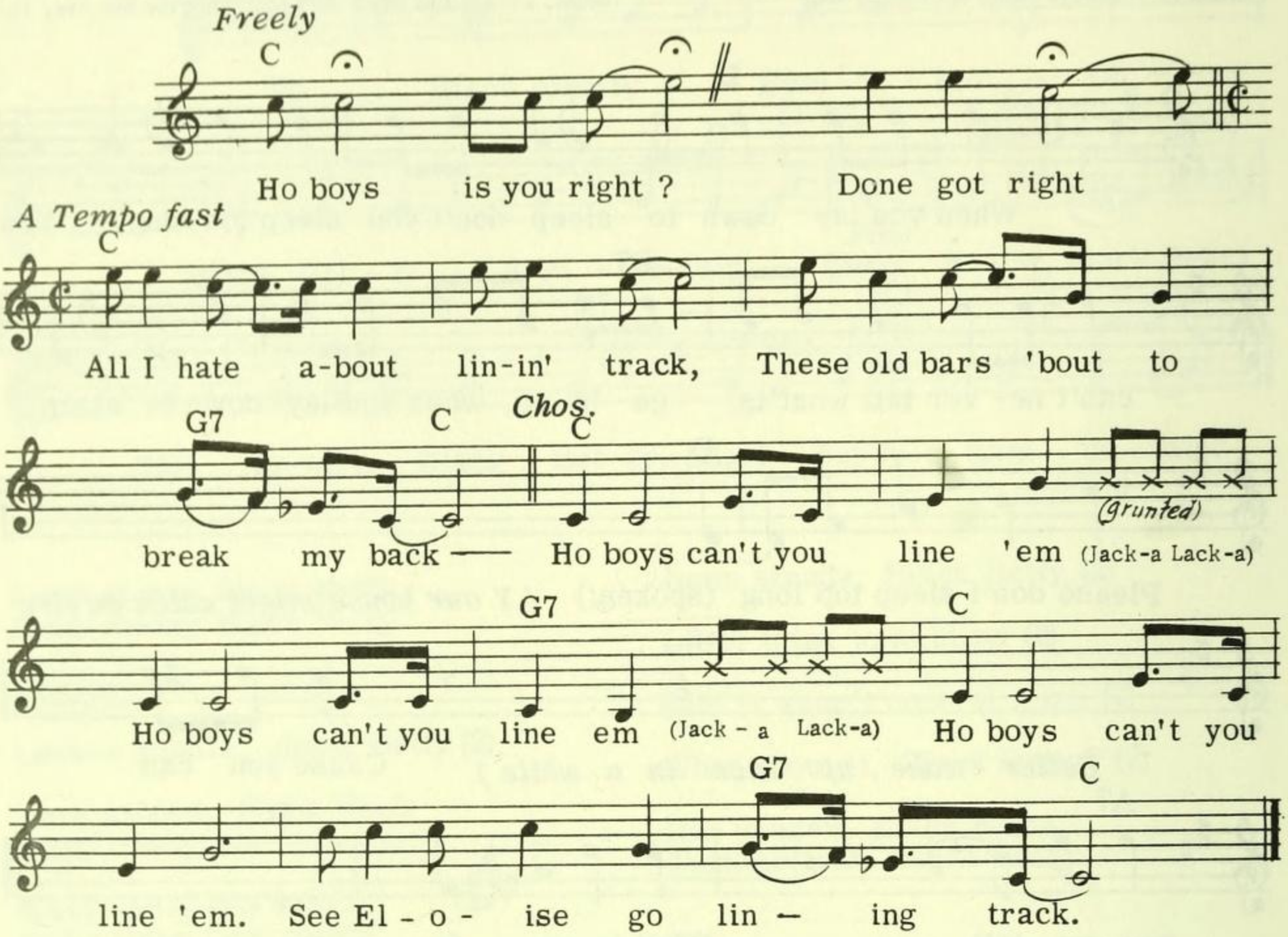
You can go to bed early, and early
rise,
It will make you healthy, wealthy and
wise.

MASKED MOB DRAGS NEGRO FROM JAIL AND SHOOTS HIM TO DEATH
KILL TWO NEGROES IN TENN. TEXAS
WORKERS ROUSED TO FURY OVER MOB LYNCHINGS
NEGRO WORKER IS LYNCHED BY MOB
THOUSANDS SEE TWO LYNCHED IN INDIANA
KILL NEGRO AND BURN HIS BODY
TEXAS LYNCHERS BURN 3 BLOCKS OF NEGRO HOMES
LYNCHED NEGRO WORKER
LYNCH 65 YEAR OLD WOMAN
Stop Lynching!

Can't You Line 'Em?

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

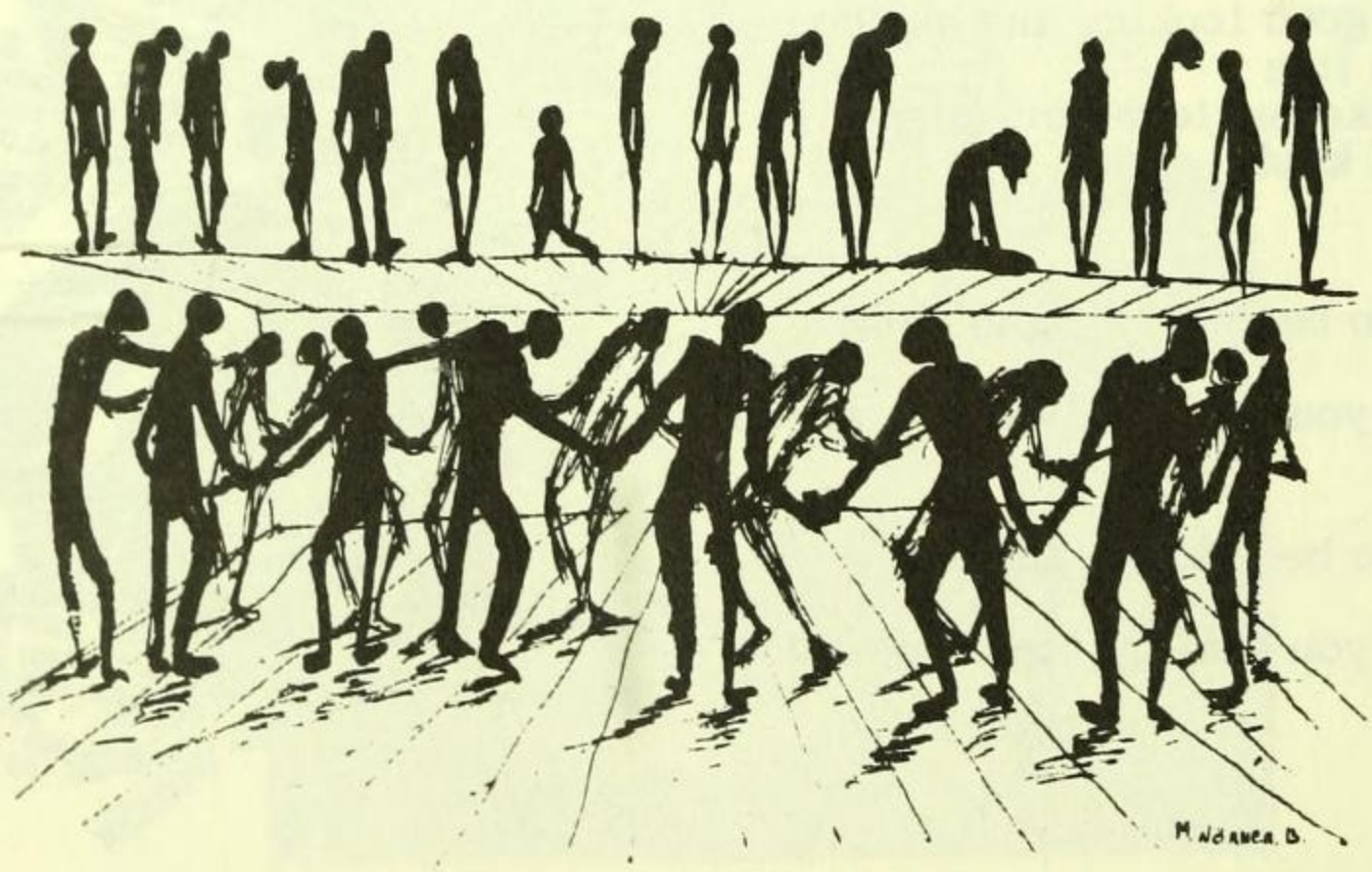
A work song is when you sing that gives you a feelin' and keeps you from gettin' tired. And when you get hungry, if you sing, you forget about being hungry. And when you sing, you swing as you sing; and that's what you call a work song.


Freely
C
Ho boys is you right ? Done got right
A Tempo fast
C
All I hate a-bout lin-in' track, These old bars 'bout to
Chos.
G7
C
C
break my back — Ho boys can't you line 'em (Jack-a Lack-a)
(grunted)
G7
C
Ho boys can't you line em (Jack - a Lack-a) Ho boys can't you
G7
C
line 'em. See El - o - ise go lin — ing track.

Moses stood on the Red Sea Shore
Smotin' that water with a two-by-four.

If I could I surely would
Stand on the rock where Moses stood.

Mary and the baby lying in the shade
Thinking on the money I ain't made.



Jean Harlow

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Leadbelly told me that at night in prison when thoughts turned to women he composed this song. Since guitars were forbidden he played it on the concertina.
M. Asch

G D7 G
Jean Har-low died the oth- er day These are the
D7 G
words I heard her say Her moth-er was sit- ting at her
D7
bed - side and cryin' I be - lieve to my soul that
G Chorus (Em) (Am) D7
my child's dyin' Tang a lang, Tang a lang ba-da-da-dee dle de
G (Em) (Am) D7 G (Em)
tang a lang tang a lang ba- da -da -deed - le de Tang a lang tang a lang
(Am) D7 G (Em)
ba da dee - dle de Oh Her ma - ma goin' to walk, her
(Am) D7 G (Em)
ma - ma talk yes, her ma - ma goin' to walk her
(Am) D7 G (Em)
Ma - ma talk yes her ma - ma goin to walk her
(Am) D7 G
ma - ma talk New York

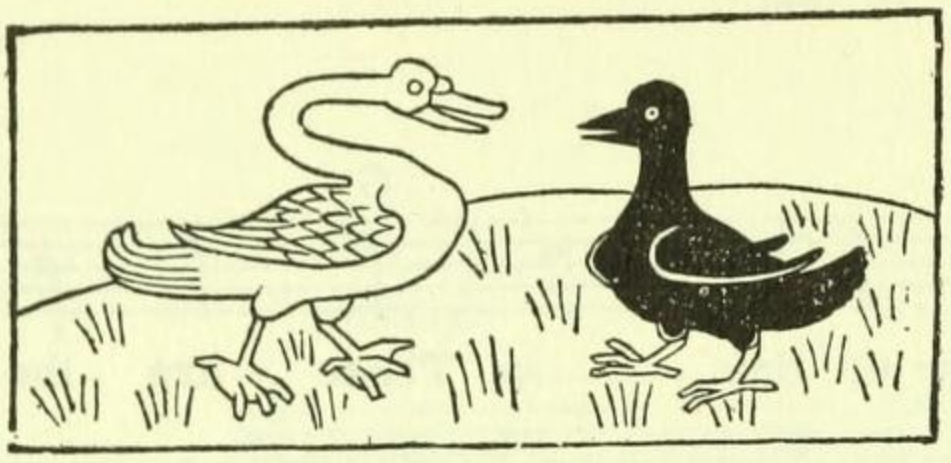
I looked out the other day,
These are the words I heard her say;
Her mother was settin' on her bedside
a-cryin',
"I believe to my soul that my child is
dyin'." (Chorus)

Send for the doctor, the doctor come.
Mother says, "Doctor, can you
save me one?"
Doctor says, "Well, I believe I
will go,
Need me tomorrow, you can let me
know." (Chorus)

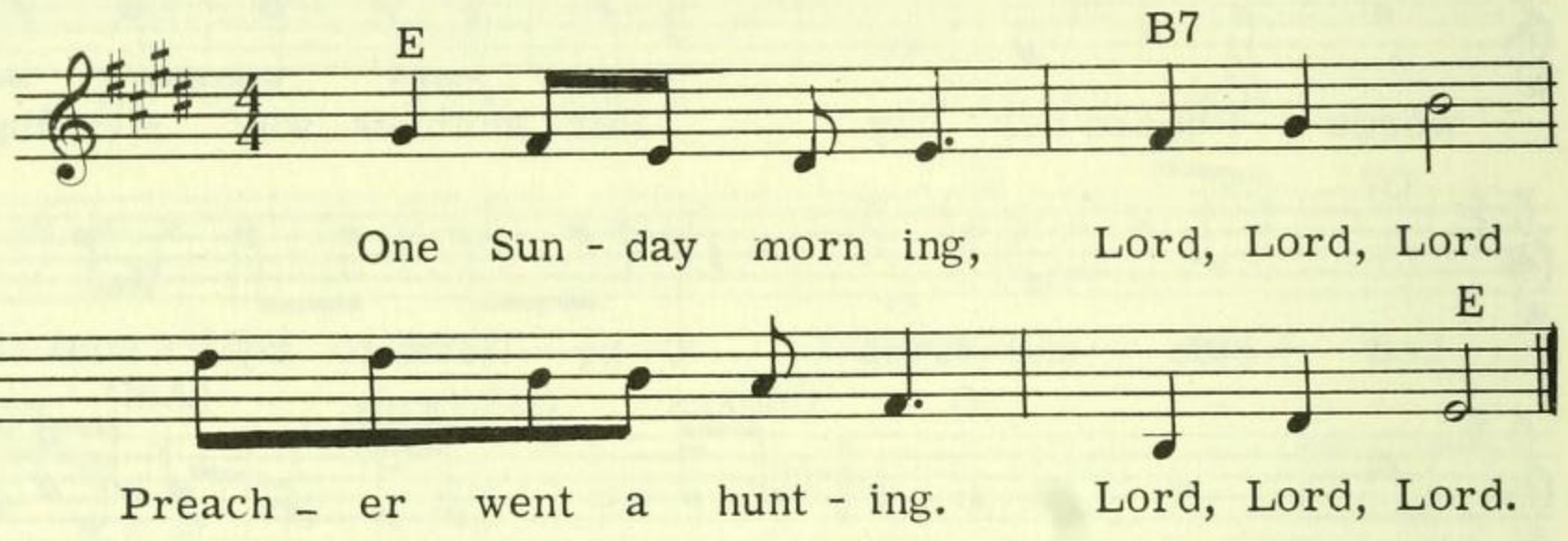
Doctor left, he was looking mighty
sad.
"This is the hardest case I ever had."
Jean Harlow said just before she died,
"Two more moving pictures I would
like to write." (Chorus)

Grey Goose

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Edited with new additional material by John A. Lomax
and Alan Lomax
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.



Down in my home people go to church on a Sunday. A Baptist Church. . . .had a preacher which was the pastor of that church and instead of . . . goin' to church that Sunday he went out and tried to kill a gray goose and the goose is still laughin' at him".



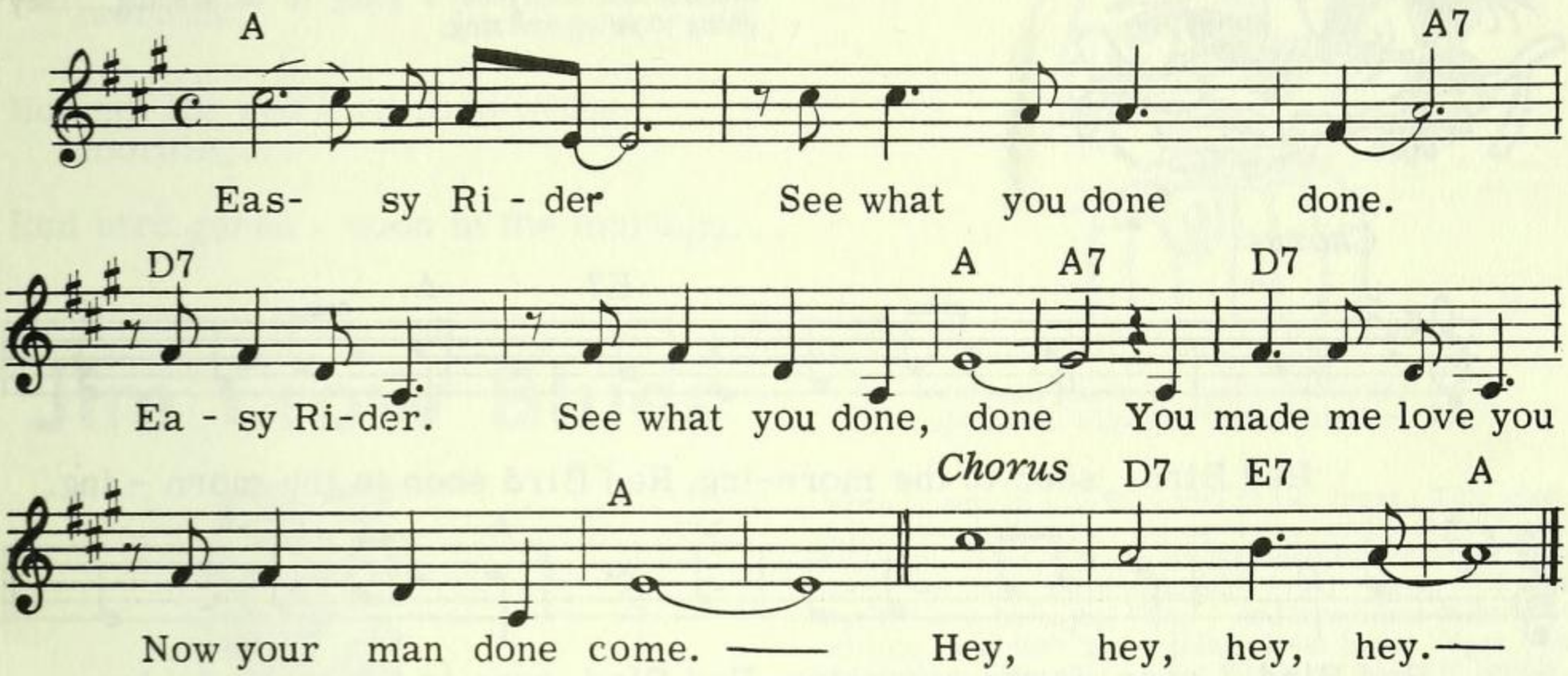
He carried along a shot-gun, Lord,
Lord Lord,
Long come a gray goose, Lord,
Lord, Lord.
The gun went off boo-loom, Lord,
Lord, Lord,
Down come the gray goose, Lord,
Lord, Lord.
He was six weeks a fallin', Lord,
Lord, Lord,
He was six weeks a haulin', Lord,
Lord, Lord.
Then my wife and your wife, Lord,
Lord, Lord,
Give it feather pickin', Lord, Lord,
Lord.
They were six weeks a pickin', Lord,
Lord, Lord,
They put him on a parboil, Lord,
Lord, Lord.

He was six weeks a boilin',
And they put him on a table,
And the fork wouldn't stick him
And the knife wouldn't cut him.
And they throwed him in the hog pen,
And the hogs couldn't eat him,
And he broke the hogs teeth out.
And they put him in the saw-mill,
And the saw couldn't cut him,
And he broke all the teeth out.

And the last time I seed him, Lord,
Lord, Lord,
Flyin' 'cross the ocean, Lord, Lord,
Lord.
With a long string of goslins,
And they all gwine, quack-quack.

Easy Rider

The blues ain't nothing but a good man feeling bad.


A
A7
Eas- sy Ri - der See what you done done.
D7
A A7 D7
Ea - sy Ri-der. See what you done, done You made me love you
A
Chorus D7 E7 A
Now your man done come. —— Hey, hey, hey, hey.——

If you catch me stealing please don't
tell on me
If you catch me stealing please don't
tell on me
I'm stealing back to my old times used
to be.
Hey, hey, hey, hey.

If I was a catfish swimming in the
deep blue sea (3x)
Hey, hey, hey, hey.

I would set all you women diving after
me (3x)
Hey, hey, hey, hey.

Easy Rider, hear me calling you (3x)
You're three times seven and you
know what you're gonna do.

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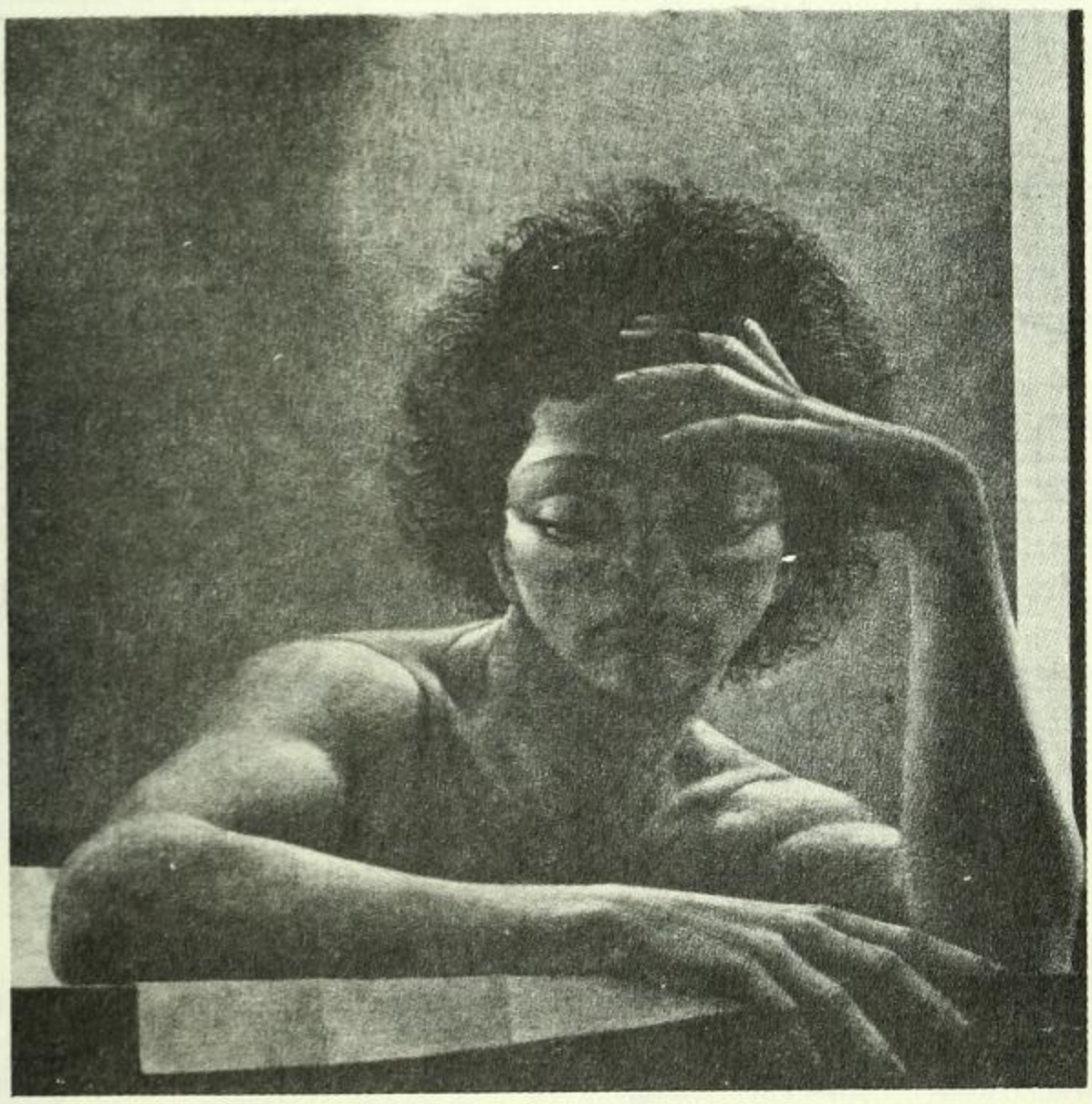


Red Bird

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Now this is a children's song when they done got warmed up. Now they going to dance to this song, and it's Redbird. Now all of them in the ring this time's got onto each other's hands. And they going to sing about the redbird and everybody's going to be dancing. They going to swing and sing.

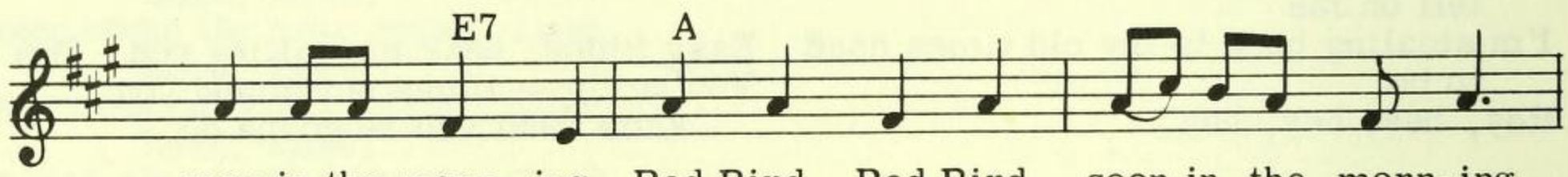
Chorus

Red Bird soon in the morn-ing, Red Bird soon in the morn - ing.

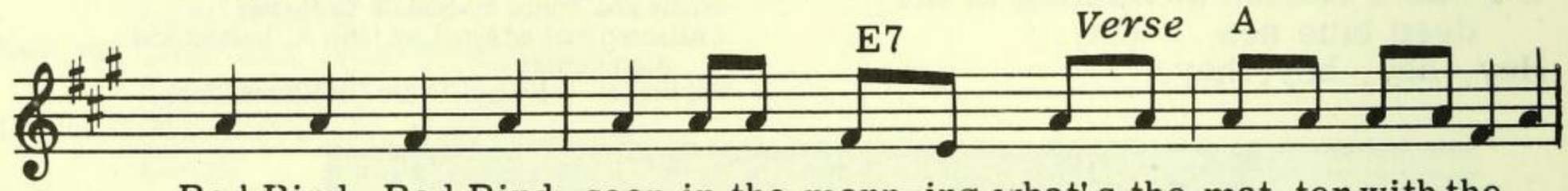
Red Bird soon in the morn-ing Red Bird soon in the morn - ing

Fine.

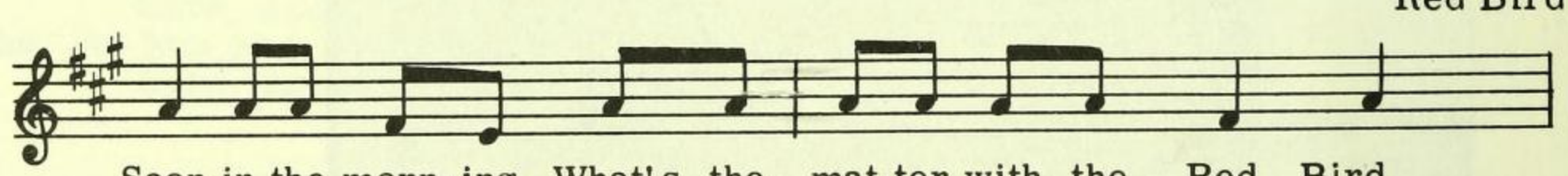
Red Bird, Red Bird soon in the morn - ing - Red Bird, Red Bird



soon in the morn- ing Red Bird, Red Bird soon in the morn-ing

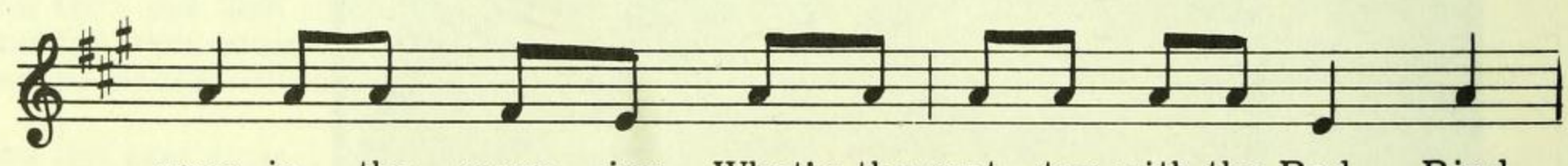


Red Bird, Red Bird soon in the morn-ing what's the mat-ter with the Red Bird



Soon in the morn-ing, What's the mat-ter with the Red Bird

soon in the morn- ing, What's the mat -ter with the Red Bird



soon in the morn- ing, What's the mat - ter with the Red Bird

soon in the morn- ing.

Cat got the red bird soon in the
morning,
Cat got the red bird soon in the
morning,
Cat got the red bird soon in the
morning,
Cat got the red bird soon in the
morning.

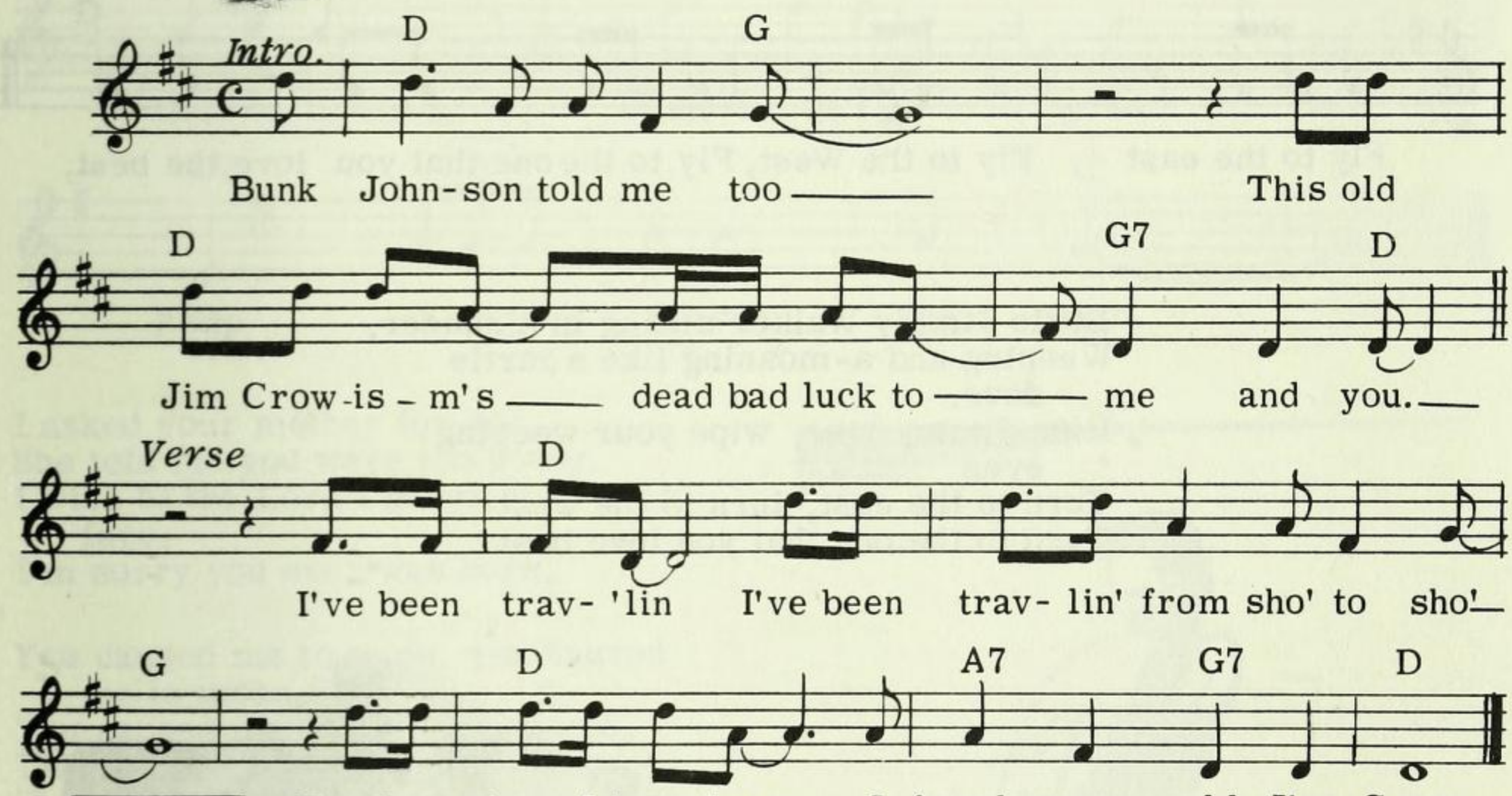
Hog got the red bird soon in the
morning...

Red bird gonna - soon in the morning...

Jim Crow Blues

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

When I come in a train, I stop in Las Vegas. This white fellow was with me. He sat down and I thought it was all right. Man taps me on the shoulder and says, "I'm sorry, we don't serve colored." And I says, "Oh you don't?" and he says, "No." And that white fellow got up too. We ain't got nothing to eat in Las Vegas. So many places like that. I just feel sorry for them people. They ain't woke up yet.



One thing people, I want everybody to
know
You gonna find some Jim Crow
everyplace you go.

Down in Louisiana, Tennessee,
Georgia's a mighty good place to go,
And get together and break up this old
Jim Crow.

I told everybody over the radio
Make your mind and get together and
break up this old Jim Crow.

I'm gonna tell you people something
that you don't know
It's a lotta Jim Crow in a moving-
picture show.

I'm gonna sing this verse - I ain't gonna
sing no More,
Please get together - break up this old
Jim Crow.

Little Sally Walker

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter
Publisher: Folkways Music Publishers, Inc.

Now this is another little children's play song. They gonna play and they gonna put one inside of the ring and they all gonna be going around and they all gonna sing. And this one in the ring is sitting down in a chair. They gonna give this one in the chair a hankie. And when they holler "Rise Sally Rise, Wipe your weeping eyes," she gonna rise out of the chair. And when they say "Fly to the east and fly to the west, fly to the one you love the best," she gonna fly and catch one that's going around the ring and catch him by the hand, gonna put him in the ring and he gonna sit down in the chair what Sally got out of. Now here's what they gonna sing while they all go round the ring.

G
Lit-tle Sal-ly Walk-er sit-ting in a sau-cer weep-ing and a-moan-ing
C
G
like a tur-tle dove. Rise, Sal-ly, rise Wipe your weep-ing eyes
D7
G
Fly to the east - Fly to the West, Fly to the one that you love the best.

Little Jimmy Walker sitting in a saucer,
Weeping and a-moaning like a turtle
dove.
Rise Jimmy rise, wipe your weeping
eyes
Turn to the east, turn to the west
Turn to the one that you love best

Irene

Words and Music by Huddie Ledbetter and John Lomax
Publisher: Ludlow Music Inc.

Chorus

G D7 G
I- rene good night —— I - rene good night Good
G7 C D7
night, I- rene, Good night I - rene, I'll kiss you in my
G G D7
dreams. - Some-times I live in the coun-try Some-times I
C
live — in town. —— Some-times I have a great no- tion to
D7 3 G
jump in-to the ri- ver and drown.

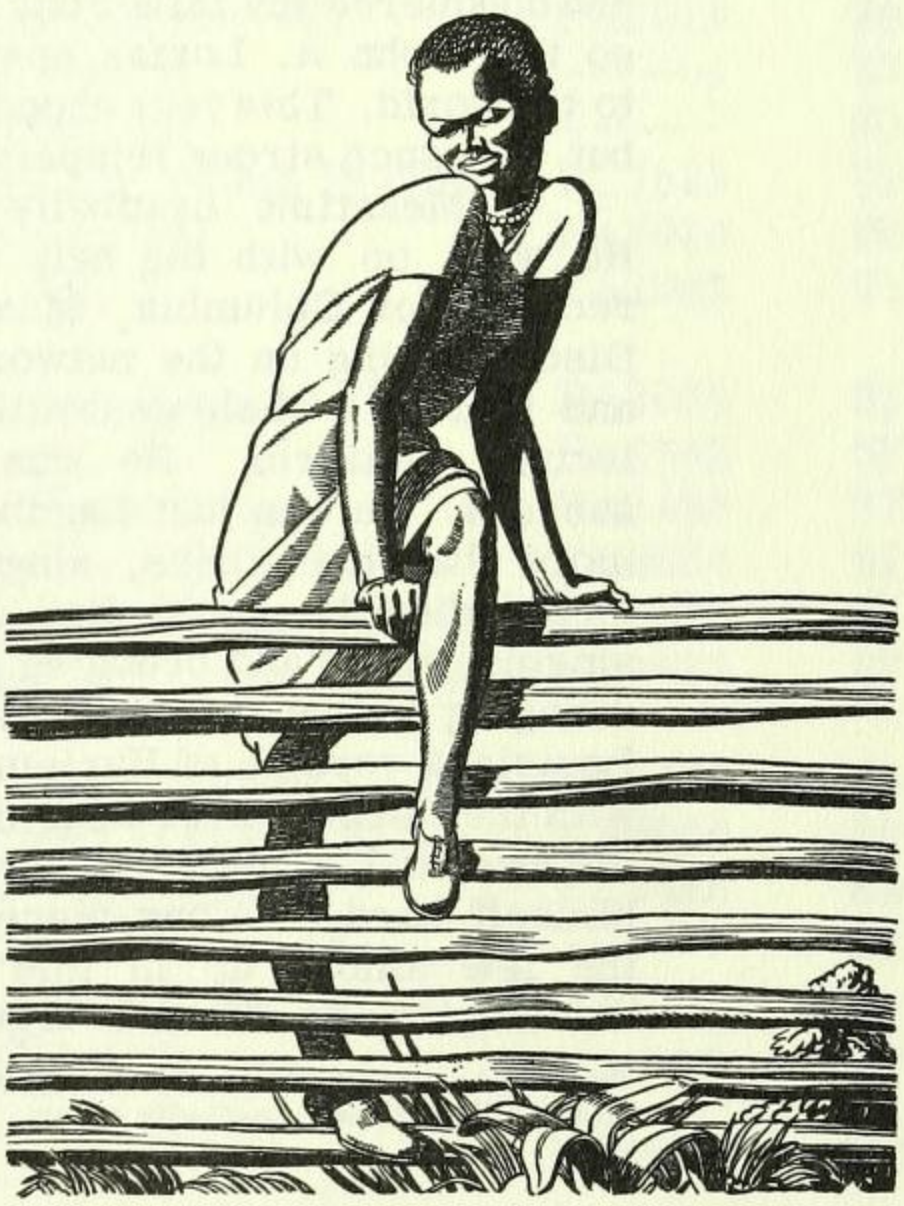
I asked your mother for you,
She told me you were too young.
I wish to the Lord I never seen your face,
I'm sorry you ever was born.

You caused me to weep, you caused me to moan,
You caused me to leave my home.
The last word I ever heard her say,
"I want you to sing me a song."

Stop rambling and stop gambling,
Quit staying out late at night.
Go home to your wife and your family,
Sit down by the fireside bright.

I love Irene, God knows I do,
I love her till the sea runs dry.
If Irene turns her back on me
I'm gonna take morphine and die.

And when I come back again, I hope you'll listen to me sing . . . . Irene Goodnight.



Huddie Ledbetter

The great Negro folk artist, Huddie Ledbetter, was renamed Leadbelly by his buddies because he had guts of steel and could outwork, outsing and outlast anybody else on a job.

Leadbelly left his mark on his era; his steel voice, his steel arm on the twelve strings and his high-voltage personality captured audiences everywhere. More than any other singer, he demonstrated to a streamlined, city-oriented world that America had living folkmusic – swamp primitive, angry, freighted with great sorrow and great joy.

As the half century came to a close Huddie Ledbetter ended his walk through the valley of the shadow and sat down at that welcome table specially prepared for Scott Joplin and Dan Emmet, for Black Patti and John Henry, for Buddy Bolden and Blind Lemon. Like the rest of that happy company of American singers, Leadbelly had opened a road for the others who would come after.

Leadbelly was born (circa 1888) and raised on a good Black-land farm near Shreveport, Louisiana. His daddy taught him how to pick cotton and his uncle taught him how to pick guitar. Huddie had a guitar and a pistol and girl friends of his own at a tropically early age. When he came to town, he added the blues to his already long list of devil's ditties from the country square dances. This world of exploited black workers was violent and it was creative; Huddie was a champion on all counts – working, fighting, making music. If he feared anything in his life, it was failure. "I wants to be the best – the king," he always said. In the end the "king of the twelve string guitar players of the world" died of the same disease that killed Lou Gehrig, the iron man of baseball.

As everyone knows, Leadbelly's ballad plea for mercy won a pardon from Governor Pat Neff of Texas, who had sworn never to pardon a prisoner so long as he was governor and who broke his promise only when he encountered this fireball on the twelve strings. He also met and conquered my father one summer afternoon in Louisiana, so that John A. Lomax spent a year introducing Leadbelly to the world. This year ended bitterly for both of these men, but two such strong temperaments can seldom collaborate.

Meantime Leadbelly had become a national figure. He went on with the help of relays of devotees to make records for Columbia, Musicraft, Victor, Capitol, Asch, Disc; to sing on the networks; and, above all, to enchant and terrify a whole generation of college students from the lecture platform. He was never a political or financial success. He was just Leadbelly, independent of the others, more than the others, singing for his family in his apartment when he could find no other audience, continually singing, silent and brooding between sessions, flamboyantly swinging a copper-wound cane along the streets, speaking a Louisiana version of Harlem jive, rejoicing in his success with the chicks, never ceasing to show his wife that she was the sweetest of them all, and always and forever driving himself hard, – a one-piece man, as someone said, one of the few among us in this time privileged to sing about Washington, as "That Bourgeois Town."

From Alan Lomax's introduction to Folkway's "Take This Hammer" Leadbelly Album.

– Alan Lomax

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The songs in this book are all transcribed from the singing of Huddie Ledbetter on Folkways Records or from the private collection of Moses Asch. Here is a listing of all the songs in this book with appropriate Folkways Records album information. For more information on the recordings, write to: Folkways Records, 701 Seventh Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10036.

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